

# **JADAVPUR JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

36

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T. S. Satyanath	Change and Variation within a Tradition	7
Smita Das and and Panchanan Mohanty	Nabagunjara in Oriya Literature and Painting	33
Prem K Srivastava	Popular Literature: A Fielderian Perspective	41
Jalul Uddin Khan	The Road Not Taken: A View of William Blake's Originality	57
Chinmay Guha	Tristan Corbière and T.S.Eliot: The Return of the Dead	79
Sisir Kumar Das	Shakespeare in Indian Languages	111

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Swapn Majumdar

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Few students of Comparative Literature may know that when JJCL was brought out in 1960-61 by Buddhadeva Bose, the founder-Chairman of the Department, it had the distinction of being the first CL journal in Asia. Now more than half a dozen of its kind are being published from various Asiatic countries. During the last four decades thirty-one issues of JJCL were published, including five joint numbers. The first nine of these are long out of print and the Department is often approached to bring out a selection from the JJCL. The fortieth anniversary may be the right occasion to do so.

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SWAPAN MAJUMDAR



*T. S. Satyanath*

## **CHANGE AND VARIATION WITHIN A TRADITION: The Story of Ciruttonḍar in Medieval Indian Literature**

Tracing the movements of values, ideas and themes in Indian Literature is a problematic one, despite several successful attempts by the scholars. The problems that a scholar confronts are broadly of two types. The first one is due to the very nature of Indian literature, namely, not the western 'one language one literature' model but the Indian 'several languages one literature' model. The second one, a methodological issue, is due to the way in which the nature of inter-relationships among different Indian languages are being perceived in the studies. This relationship is actually a status oriented one and by implication creates a status oriented position to different languages and makes the issues look different from what they are.

Firstly, the very fact that Indian literature exists not in one language but in several languages and have histories of varying periods, hence, periodization of different Indian literatures on a comparative basis becomes extremely difficult one. Added to this is the problem of lack of working knowledge in these languages which prevents a direct access to the original texts. Even if someone has a working knowledge of the language, the nature of medieval literary texts, written in an older form of language in the case of Kannada, actually necessitates the knowledge of that particular variety as used in the literary texts. In the case of Tamil and Kannada, their old and medieval stages are significantly different from that of the modern one, it needs a mastery of those forms to do a direct reading. The histories of literatures in different languages starts differently : Tamil (B.C. 200), Kannada (9th C. A.D.), Telugu (11th C. A.D.), Marathi and Malayalam (14th C. A.D.) and in other modern Indian languages much later.

Secondly, the theoretical models that exist among us to understand the direction of the movements of ideas, values and themes are not satisfactory ones. There are three such dominant points of views, each

suggesting a particular direction of influence. They are Sanskritic influence on literatures of India, Dravidian influence on Sanskrit literature, more often understated as Dravidian contribution to Sanskrit literature. The third position is an in between position that both Sanskrit and Indian languages might not have influenced each other directly, but might have undergone influence by a third language like Prakrit.

The most dominant point of view, in this regard, is the Sanskritic influence on different Indian languages. We can call this the classical point of view. This is what the European scholars believed to start with. As Sanskrit is the oldest language within the subcontinent as it is evidenced by the presence of literature, any similarity between Sanskrit literature and the literature in Indian languages was attributed to Sanskritic influence on the respective language. It was not entirely a western point of view in its clear sense. In fact, several traditional grammarians in Indian languages did believe that everything in the languages of the world originated from Sanskrit and its related languages, Bhattakalanka, a 18th century Sanskrit grammarian from Karnataka, observes in his *Śabdānuśāsana* that all the languages of the world are born out of three and a half languages, namely, Sanskrit, Paisaci Prakrit and Apabhramsa. Zvelebil (1974) clearly demonstrates how the traditional Tamil Pundits believed that Tamil too originated from Sanskrit. Thus we have a series of studies which tries to trace the Sanskritic influence on different literatures. We can attribute this view to most of the native and western scholars who wrote during the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries. We may identify the direction as left to right of influence.

The second point of view, the Dravidian influence on Sanskrit literature identifies the path of influence in the direction exactly in the reverse direction of the first point of view. Based on the insights developed by linguists like Emeneau (1956, 1962) and Burrow (1968), the scholars this point of view hold that a lot of elements that are not found in Vedic Sanskrit literature, but are found both in ancient Tamil and classical literature have to be attributed to the influence of Dravidian on Sanskrit. For example, Dhvani 'suggestion', which is not to be found in Vedic literature but is found amply in the classical literature (in fact, the entire Sanskrit poetics's later discussion centres around Dhvani) is

considered to have been Dravidian in origin as it is present in Tamil literature right from the beginning. Linchard (1986) stresses that this movement is from Dravidian to Sanskrit, a direct one. The direction of influence can be identified as right to left.

The third point of view that both Sanskrit and Dravidian might have taken such common elements such as Dhvani, came originally from Hart (1974). He thinks that Prakrit secular poetry, particularly *Gāthāsapataśatī*, might have Dhvani right from the beginning and there is a possibility that both Sanskrit and Tamil might have borrowed the concept from Prakrit. In other words, this point of view assumes that the direction of influence is from top to bottom.

Apart from the above three points of views, there is a need to have a fourth point of view and this section discusses it in detail. Just like a superstrate top to bottom influence can be postulated, we can also posit a bottom to top substrate influence in Indian literature. The movement from folk literature to written literature is clearly evident in Indian literature. Bhakti movement in different parts of the country is an ideal case for this. The left to right point of view traces the origin of the Bhakti movement in *Nāradiya Bhaktisūtra*. The right to left point of view traces the origin to the Alvars and Nayanmars of the Tamil Vaishnavite and Shaivite movements. The top to bottom point of view suggest that the compilation of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, though compiled most probably in South India, is the source material for the diffusion of Bhakti movement all over India. But these arguments ignore to notice an important point that the elements of Bhakti are all present at the substrate level (folklore) in each regional language. Unless we postulate such a bottom to top movement of ideas, it is difficult to account for the spread of Bhakti movement all over India. This also accounts for the regional differences in the very nature of Bhakti movement. It may not be inappropriate to assume that different strands of Bhakti were originally present at the substratum level (folk religion) and the mutual influences from top, left to right and right to left reinforced in its consolidation as a single unit. This perspective that the Bhakti movement is an outcome of movements not in any one direction, but from several directions gives us a theoretical model to account not only for its similarities but also for its differences in different Indian languages. It is with this composite

theoretical model that we need to study any aspect of medieval Indian literature and the present study of the episode Ciruttoṇḍar follows this framework.

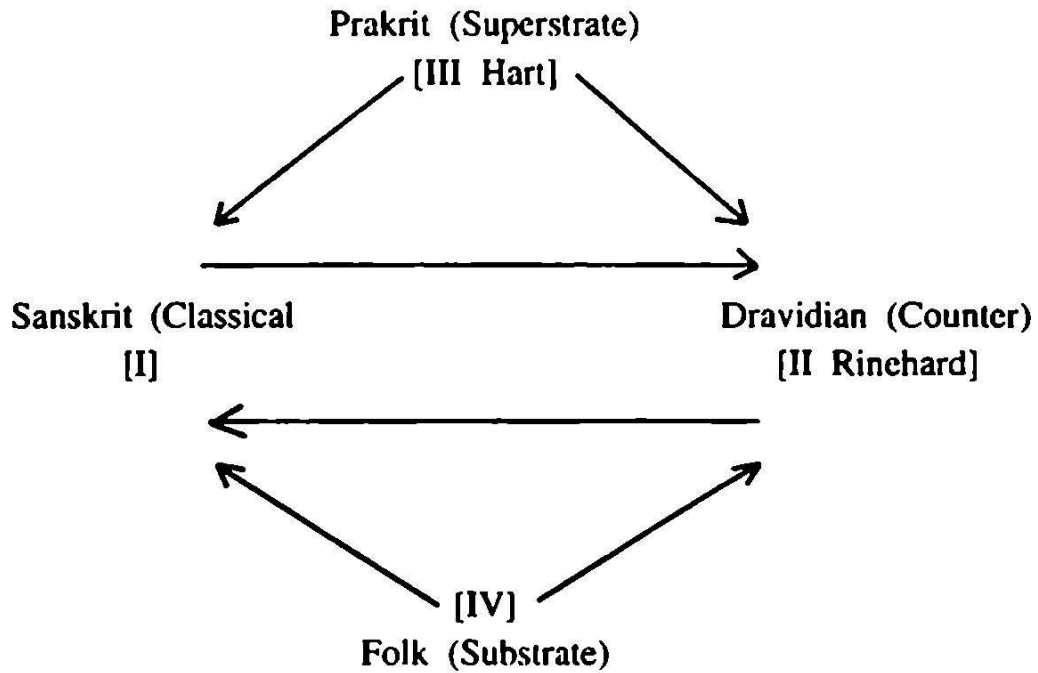


Fig. 1 : Schematic diagram suggesting the possibility of movements in Indian Literature.

The present study attempts to study the episode of Ciruttoṇḍar in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Marathi literatures. In this sense it is a historical study of the episode with the transformations in the theme as its focus. Thematic transformations, thus, accounts for the corresponding change in the religious associations. In addition, the study also tries to point out the movement of the episode at several levels, namely, literary, popular and folk. The study also demonstrates the transmission of the episode with different religious groups, thereby continuing the tradition on the one hand and at the same time changing in its content to account for the changing world-view on the other. There are several versions of the episode in five languages, namely, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi and Sanskrit and are available in literary, popular and folk mediums. For the sake of convenience, I have broadly put them into three categories, ignoring the Sanskrit rendering of the texts in Tamil

and Kannada Saivite traditions is always found to be a later attempt for codification and sanctification.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, I am going to deal with the Tamil sources separately as they formed the source for other languages. Secondly, I am going to deal with all the sources that have come under the Virasaiva influence together. Thus, Kannada, Telugu and Marathi literary sources come under this heading. Finally, I am going to touch upon the folk tradition. As it is available to us from the story in *The Epic of Palnāṭu*. I do not have much information on the version available in the popular tradition (Vrata kathas) and has not been dealt here.

### *The Story of Ciruttoṇḍar in Tamil*

Ciruttoṇḍar, who is also known as Paramjoti, was the commander in chief (Mahamatya) for the Pallava king Narasimha Varma. He belonged to the merchant caste and was a great warrior too. Ciruttoṇḍar, according to Iyer (19- - : 139) is responsible for the destruction of Vatapi, the capital of the Chalukya king Pulakesin II in 642 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Sambandhar, one of the Nayanmars has referred to Ciruttoṇḍar in eleven Tevarams and one of them refers to a wound the Ciruttoṇḍar had suffered in the battle of Vatapi. Sekkilar's (c. A.D. 1064) *Periya Puranam* too, has referred to this incident. However, the later works in other languages as well as the earlier works in Tamil are conspicuously silent about this historical fact. This suggests the way how the haigiographic tradition treats history in Indian literature.

The earliest evidence that we have in the form of haigiography (apart from the Tevarams), Sundarar's *Tiruttoṇḍar togai* 'The collection of the praise of the great servants', which is in Virudam metre, a four-line metre actually meant to be sung. The approximate time of the work is about A.D. 850. There is a one line reference to Ciruttoṇḍar and it goes as follows: cengattangudi meye Ciruttondarkku adiyen,<sup>3</sup> 'I am a servant of Ciruttoṇḍar who hails from Cengattangudi' (stanza 6, line 4). Two interesting points to be noticed here are that there is no reference to any of the historical aspects associated with the life of Ciruttoṇḍar and that the work was meant to be sung in front of the gathering of devotees. In fact, *Tiruttoṇḍar togai* does not belong to the haigiographic tradition in a way as they are poems in praise of the Nāyanmārs.



Sundarar is the last in the line of the sixty-three Nāyanmārs and the haigiographic tradition of Nāyanmārs actually started from Nāmbiyāṇḍār Nambi (c. AD. 10th century) who composed *Tiruttonḍar Tiruvandādi* 'the andādi in praise of the great servants'. Andādi (Skt. antyādi) is a four-line metre, post-Sangam in its nature and is normally recited in the gatherings. The forty-third verse describes Ciruttonḍar as follows :

Having butchered into pieces  
and having fed his own young son  
who was babbling around wearing a jingling anklet  
and who is like nector to Lord Shiva  
who has a tiger-skin wrapped around him.  
Look at him, towards Ciruttonḍar  
who conquered the mighty fate  
and earned a great fame  
that great man, the chiefton of Cengāḍu  
the town decorated by the surrounding heavenly gardens

The episode had already changed to the narrative medium from the singing medium. In addition except for the historical reference to Ciruttonḍar as the chiefton of Cengāḍu, there is no other historical fact here. But importantly, it contains the most crucial information that he offered his own son to Shiva, who had come in the robe of tiger-skin, suggesting that Shiva had assumed the form of a Bhairava. These two elements constitutes the integral part of the episode in almost all the later versions.

The culminating point of Tamil Shaivite haigiographic tradition was actually Sēkkiḷār's *Periya Purāṇam*, who lived towards the end of eleventh century (C. A.D. 1064). Neelakanthashastri (19// : 362) is of the opinion that the Tēvārāms, *Tiruttonḍar togai*, *Tiruttonḍar Tiruvandādi*, the inscriptions and the versions of the stories popular among the devotees must have formed the sources for *Periya Purāṇam*. We should notice that the title has already become a Purāṇa, thus signifying its status, a process of Sanskritization. The episode of Ciruttonḍar as given *Periya Purāṇam*, is summarised based on Vanmikanathan (1985) and Dehejia (1988).

The valour and charity of Ciruttonḍar has been praised in the beginning of the episode. Though he fought for his Pallava king in the battle, later the King was told that charity is the primary business of



Ciruttoṇḍar and that he should be let to be with it rather than other worldly things. The fame of his charity reached Kailasa, the abode of Siva and Siva decided to test his devotee and demonstrate his devotee's devotion to the whole world. Accordingly, one morning Siva assumes the form of a Bhairava devotee with a matted hair, wearing an elephant skin, and holding a skull in hand, and enquiring about the whereabouts of the house, arrived at Ciruttoṇḍar's house and requested for a midday meal. Ciruttoṇḍar had gone out of his house, in search of a man to feed. His wife, Sandanam opens the door and was overjoyed at the opportunity to serve a Siva devotee. She welcomed the guest into his home. The guest says that as per the custom he wouldn't enter the house where a lady is alone and went and sat down under a Atti tree. When Ciruttoṇḍar came back, the wife told him about the guest. Ciruttoṇḍar went to the guest and invited him for a midday meal. As though in challenge, the guest informed Ciruttoṇḍar that he ate only once in three seasons, and that the meal had to be *Paśu*. Interpreting *Paśu* as a cow (and this in itself would be sacrilegious), Ciruttoṇḍar asked him to choose a cow from his herd. But the guest specified that the *Paśu* that he desires must be a human, that it must be no more than five years of age, and that it must be willingly cut and cooked by his parents.

A good boy,  
 the only son in the family,  
 the father should slaughter him,  
 while the mother holds him fast,  
 thus if both of them are ungrieving to do  
 and serve it as curry to us,  
 that is the food we eat.

(Vanmikanathan's translation)

After conferring at length with his wife, Ciruttoṇḍar agreed to provide such a meal. His wife hesitated initially to sacrifice their only son and asked her husband 'are we going to get the only son of the family?' Ciruttoṇḍar appears to have convinced her and told her, 'since we could not demand such a sacrifice by anyone else, it becomes necessary to sacrifice our own son'. Sirala, their son, was in school at that time and Ciruttoṇḍar went and fetched him from the school. After preparing the child for slaughtering and having cooked the curry, the couple invites the guest to eat. The guest now insisted that Ciruttoṇḍar should eat with him, informing him that he never ate alone. As a host Ciruttoṇḍar

unwillingly sat down with the guest. Then the guest expressed his wish to meet the host's son before sitting down for the meal. Despite protests from Ciruttoṇḍar that calling of his son would be of no avail, the guest insisted that he go to the door and call out to Sirala. The legend tells of the miracle of the sacrificed child Sirala who came running in answer to his father's call. It also tells of the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the guest who had requested such a strange meal. What doubt could there be that the guest was none other than Siva himself? Also, the entire city and the couple with the child are taken to Kailasa.

### *The Episode of Siriyāḷa in Vīraśaiva Tradition*

The earliest Kannada source which deals with the story of Siriyāḷa is Harihara's *Siriyāḷana Ragale* (c. AD 1230). However, Devirappa (1968) has pointed out that Harihara may not be the author of this work and this particular ragale appears to be a later interpolation. Although the thirty-sixth story in prose, *Aruvattumūvara Kathāgarbha* 'the story womb of the sixty-three', deals with the story of Siriyāḷa, this too is not authored by Harihara and follows the story pattern of Lakkaṇṇa Daṇḍeśa's *Śivatatva cintāmaṇi* which belongs to c. AD 1450. Then the earliest document of the Vīraśaiva Tradition to deal with the episode of Siriyāḷa would actually be the Telugu *Basava Purāṇamu* by Pāḷkurike Sōmanātha (c.AD 1300). Sōmanātha has also written in Kannada and Sanskrit and is very much revered by the poets in Kannada and Telugu alike. *Basava Purāṇamu* appears to have become the source of inspiration and model for several works in Telugu and Kannada. In Telugu itself, Subbarao (1986) points out the piḍuparti Somanatha's *Basava Purāṇamu* in Dvipadi metre, Mahadevādhya's *Basava Purāṇamu* in Campu and Timmulapalli Nāgabhvṣaṇakavi's *Basava Vijaya* are indebted to it. In addition, a Sanskrit version<sup>4</sup> of it by an Aradhya Pundit from Ēlūr in the form of a dialogue between Lord Skanda and the sage Agastya and a Tamil version are also available. In Kannada, he is considered as of such importance in the Vīraśaiva tradition, that Tōṇṭada Siddhalinga Yati wrote *Pāḷkurike Sōmanatha Purāṇa* in Kannada in the 17th century. Bhimakavi wrote the Kannada version of *Basava Purāṇa* around AD 1350 and the poet clearly acknowledges his indebtedness

to the Telugu *Basava Purāṇamu*. In addition to this Bhimakavi also might have looked at the other versions of the story of Siriyāḷa. A look at the list of the works which contain the life of the Tamil Nāyanmārs and the Kannada Śivaśaraṇas reveals a harvest of haigiographies and Puranas written about them in different metrical forms.

Harihara	Purātanara Ragalegaḷu	Ragale	1230
Vṛnabhadra	Aravtmūru Purātanara Caritre	Ṣaṭpadi	
Śivayōgi Somēśvara	Aravatmūvara Sāṃgatya	Sāṃgatya	
Niṇṇuṇṇa Śivayōgi	Purātanara Trividhi	Tripadi	1500
Kumūru Cennabasava	Purātanara Caritre		
Bhadravīrasuta	Purātanara Purāṇa		
Lakkuṇṇa Daṇḍeśa	Śivatatva Ciṃtāmaṇi	Ṣaṭpadi	1450
Chibbi Mallanārya	Viraśaivāmrta Purāṇa		1530
Vitūpākṣa Paṃṇita	Cennabasava Purāṇa	Ṣaṭpadi	1390
Bhīmukavi	Basava Purāṇa	Ṣaṭpadi	1584
Siddhanamjēśa	Gururāja Cāritra	Ṣaṭpadi	1672
Ṣṇḍakṣuradēva	Basavarāja Vijaya	Campū	1677
Suranṇa	Triṣaṣṭi Purātana Cārtiram	Campū	
Ṣṇḍakṣuradēva	Maḥalimṅalile		
Siṃgirāja	Amala Basava Cāritra		
Śuṇṭalimṅaga Dēśika	Bhairavēśara Kāvyaḍa Kathāmani	Prose	1672
	Sūtraratnākara		

The versions in Kannada and Telugu literature more or less follow the *Periya Purāṇam* version. However, there are deviations and these deviations are done mainly to suit the world-view of the Vīraśaiva tradition. To demonstrate this point we can look at the story of Siriyāḷa in Ṣṇḍakṣuradēva's *Basavarāja Vijayam*. The way that the episode has been inserted into the main story indicates the ease at which the Vīraśaiva poets could insert and modify the stories and episodes into a text. When Basavaṇṇa says the particular Vacana Bēḍuvarillade baḍavādenayya 'I became poor and weak as the poor stopped begging things from me'. To mend the pride of Basavaṇṇa, Madivāḷa Mācayya (Mācayya the washerman) is said to have narrated the story of six of the Ādiśaraṇas, including that of Siriyāḷa to him.

It starts with the description of Kāṃcīpura and the fame of Siriyāḷa as a merchant living in that city. He was happy with his wife Ceṃṅale and the son Cēlāḷa. It was looking as though he was born on the earth

to demonstrate the greatness of feeding (annadāna) to the devotees of Siva. Siva decides to test and demonstrates his devotee's greatness to the world. Accordingly, on a heavy rainy day, Siva sends his gaḷas to go Sriyāḷa to and ask him for a meal. The couple feed them despite torrential rains. Ceṃgaḷe cooks the food getting the house dismantled for firewood and when they run short of it she uses the silk clothes they had with them for the fire. The guests are pleased by the hospitality of the couple, blessed them and went back to Kailasa and praised about the devotees to Siva. Siva himself decides to go for a feast (ārōgaṇe) and test his devotees. He meets his wife first, but realising that he is not at home goes and meets him. On being invited for a meal, he says that he is on a Vrata (śiśumāṃsaniśēvaṇasuvrataṃ) and that he can eat only from the parents who can kill, cook and feed a five year old son of theirs. Siriyāḷa agrees to it and goes home. But he wants to test the devotion of his wife before telling her about the peculiar wish of the guest and suggested her that they can get an young boy from the city and feed the guest. Ceṃgaḷe took a serious objection to the suggestion of her husband, told that he has gone mad. She also told that it is like Siva himself has come in the disguise of a Bhairava and asking for such a feast, then why go in search of other's child when we have our own at home. Siriyāḷa was highly impressed by his wife's devotion and went to fetch the child from his school. Even before Siriyāḷa reached the school, the ascetic Siva transforms himself as a common man, met Cīlāḷa at the school and told him to run away and save his life as his parents are planning to sacrifice him to be fed to a Bhairava. The young Cīlāḷa laughed at the suggestion and told him that he is ready for the occasion as it not only pleases his parents but also the desire of the Bhairava ascetic. Siva felt happy over the fact that the father, mother and the son are made for each other, assumes the form of Bhairava and went back.

When Siriyāḷa came and told his son about the situation, Cīlāḷa thought that he has become Dhanya because of the request of the ascetic and the parents' desire to fulfil it. Accordingly, after bathing the child, Ceṃgaḷe held the child and chops off the head and a meal was prepared for the guest. She kept the head aside as it contains hairs and hence forbidden for cooking (kēśadūṣita). Meanwhile, a maid servant Caṇḍini,

took the head, ground that in a mortar and pestal, mixed it with tamarind, prepared a dish out of it and hid it separately. She also decorated the house with a smearing of kastūri and a rangavalli of pearls.<sup>5</sup> Having made all the preparations for feeding, Siriyāḷa went to get the guest and brought him. While food is being served, the guest examined the cooked meat by hand and noticed that the head portion had not been served and got angry. At that moment Caṇḍini brings the dish she had prepared without the knowledge of the couple and which she had kept in hiding for feeding him. Siva was pleased with the devotion of the couple. But he wanted to test them further. He told that unless the host sits down with the guest for the meal and eats the meal the Vrata is incomplete and asked Siriyāḷa to sit and eat with him. Having heard these words, Siriyāḷa looked at the face of his wife and is in a dilemma. But Ceṃgaḷe told him to obey the guest's orders as his wishes have to be respected and obeyed. Siva now has another wish. As if he is not aware of the fact that who has been killed and cooked for the meal, he says how can one eat in a home which doesn't sound with a child's play and asked Siriyāḷa where did his son go? He also stressed that he does not want of lose his Dharma by eating in a childless home. 'Get this meal removed from here, I am not going to eat here', he said. The couple were worried and sad as the desire of feeding the guest is going to remain unfulfilled. Looking at their worried faces, the guest asked Ceṃgaḷe to go to the front door and call for her son by his name. Hesitantly, Ceṃgaḷe went to the door and called for her son. With a jingling sound of the anklets Cīlāḷa came running and bowed down to the feet of the guest. Siva revealed his real form to them and blessed them. The drums of the Heaven roared, the Gods assembled in the sky and flowered on the devotees. Having blessed by Siva, Cirutoṃḍa Māhēśvara, Ceṃgaḷe, Cīlāḷa and the entire population of the city went to kailasa in a Puṣpaka Vimāna.

In Marathi, the story of Siriyāḷa it appears in Śrīdhara's *Sivalīlāmṛt* (AD 1718) is as follows. King Siriyāḷ and his wife Cāṃguṇā are devotees of Siva. The King was running a feeding home (anna chatra) for a ten thousand years and became famous. Nārada the sage, goes to Siva and told him about it and asked him to go and have an icchā bhōjan. Shiva came to Siriyāḷ in torn and dirty clothes and asked the King for

a meal. The couple served him. The guest said that he wants to eat human flesh cooked in their house and served a meal. They consented to give their own five year old son for the guest. They asked Cilayya and he too consented to it. They killed him and kept the head as a memoir. After the cooking is done, they asked the guest to eat. The guest insisted that the King should sit down and eat with him. The King agreed to it. The guest wanted the wife too to sit down and eat the meal. Then the guest says that he dose not want to eat in a house where there is no child. Meanwhile he noticed that the head portion has not been cooked and insisted that the head too had to be cooked. Then the guest asked Caṃguṇā to ask for wish. She asks the guest to get her red of the blot of not having a child. The son is restored to the parents. Celayya is installed on the throne and Siva takes the couple to Kailasa along with him.

It is interesting to note that in Kannada Jayarāmācārya has written a work with the title *Siriyāla rāja*. The very title suggests that Siriyāla is a King in the story which may resemble the story of Siryāḷ as given in *Śivalīlāmṛit*.

### *The Episode of Ciruttoṇḍar in Folk Tradition*

In the Telugu folk version, Palnāṭi Vīruni Katha, Baluḍu is a Vaiśnavite, but in his previous birth he was born as Siriyāla Pāpayya. The story of Siriyāla Pāpayya depicts him as one of the most unswerving devotees of Siva. He is the boy who willingly allows himself to be butchered, curried and served to Iiva who is in the guise of Jangam leper. The story of Bālacandruḍ's Saivite incarnation is from the Vīraśaiva tradition, yet Bāluḍu is, in Palnāṭi Viruni Katha, a devotee of Cannakēśwara (Viṣṇu). The popular Śaivite story, here called 'The Story of Siriyāla Pāpanna' and in brief the story is as follows :

To test his devotees, Ciruttoṇḍa Bhakṭadu and his wife Siriyāla Mangamma, Iiva appears as a leprous Jangam. He tells the couple that he will be restored to health if he eats the flesh of a child who is a one and only son and who is exactly seven years old. The boy and the parents agree to the strange request, But after the boy is slain and the human curry is made, the Jangam refuses to eat unless he



has a boy child to sit beside him. He tells the parents to call their son. When the mother finally calls him, the little boy comes running, he has been fully restored. The family's devotion is rewarded. They and all their city are taken to Kailasa (Siva's dwelling place). (Roghair 1982 : 124)

*Change and Variation in the story of Ciruttoṇḍar-Siriyāla*

It is interesting to see the transformations and changes that have taken place within the Tamil literary tradition. The song form of the episode in Sundarar changes to the narrative tradition in Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi and to the Puranic form in Sēkkiḷār. In fact, the first two were to be sung and narrated in front of the gathering of devotees in the temples. In the third it has already assumed the framework of a Purana. The name of the text *Periya Purāṇam* (big, great Puranam) is its popular name and the real title which the poet had given was *Tiruttoṇḍar Purāṇam*.<sup>6</sup> Also notice that the tiger skin clad Bhairava has become the elephant skin clad Bhairava (gajacarmāṃbara dhāri) in the Puranic tradition, which is a pan-Indian concept. Siva with the tiger skin around his waist, actually appears to be more native than the elephant skin. Several of the Kannada versions (c.f. Ṣaḍakṣaradēva's Basavarāja vijaya), however, have retained the tiger skin clad Bhairava intact, which is actually the suggestion given by Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi. This and several other deviations in the Vīraśaiva Tradition actually points out to the fact that most probably, there were several versions, both written and oral narratives, pertaining to the life of the Nāyanmārs were in currency during the period. This suggests actually that several variant versions were in existence around the 11-12th century in Tamilnadu itself, and a possibility of the non-literary versions of the episode playing an important role in the diffusion of the episode all along the haigiographic tradition.

Overtly it looks as though the story has undergone several changes between the Tamil and other literary traditions, however, it is only a superficial one. The tradition has been maintained intact despite the story has travelled across different sects of Saivism. The Tamil tradition highlighted the devotion of Ciruttoṇḍar. It is the sacrifice of one's one and the only son to the guest Bhairava which makes the devotion

remarkable. The Vīraśaiva tradition of *Periya Purāṇam* itself, the story had incorporated the element of the entire city attaining a position in Kailasa even though this does not appear in *Periya Purāṇam*. Even before that, this detail had travelled to the neighbouring Karnataka is evident from the following Basavanna's Vacana no. 152 (Hiremath 1968a).

Paruṣada ḥoreyalli kabbunaviddu ḥonnāyittu nōdire  
 āvvā Cemgaḷe, nīddēlu kēriyavaru  
 liṃagada nōṃpiya nōṃtare ṇēḷe  
 Kūḍalasamgamadēnamge  
 Cīlālanemba bāyinaṇavikkidare hēḷe

Look at it women,  
 the black metal  
 having bound in a bundle of touch stones  
 became the precious gold by itself  
 Oh mother Cemgaḷe, tell me  
 those people who lived in the seven streets where you lived  
 did they take a vow to the Linga for what they got  
 Did they give a gift of Cīlāḷa to Kūḍalasamgamadēva  
 for what they got in return

Whether *Periya Purāṇam* had incorporated it or not, by AD. 1150 Basavanna was familiar with the ascent of Kailasa of the people living around the seven streets where Siriyāḷa and Cemgaḷe used to live. Definitely, the town Cengāṭṭanguḍi in Tanjore district, the home town of the chiefton saint as mentioned by Naṃbi, appears to have been forgotten by that time and the locale had been shifted to Kaṃcīpura, more popularly known as a Sivite center. It might have become difficult for the poets to account for the rationale of the entire population of the city ascending to Kailasa for the devotion of Cirutṭonḍar. Hence, we can see several attempts being made to bring the entire society into the centre of the story, initially the family (wife and son), and gradually others like the maid servant and finally involving the entire city itself with the belief that the entire population of the city comprised of none other than Sivites. We should also note that the early metrical form used in Kannada was Ragale, a descriptive meter. It is originally derived from Prakrit, but got efficiently nativised to suit the Kannada rhythm structure.



We should note that it was being initially used in Campū Kāvya for description, prayer and praise up to AD 1200 was suited ideally for the hagiographic tradition. However, its structure did not give any room for interpolations which of course, is easily possible in the forms Śatpadi and later Campū.<sup>7</sup> The additions to the story by different poets have thus, systematically balanced the Viraśaiva society by giving equal importance to the entire society. It needs to be pointed out here that they not only denounced the caste system by interdining and intercaste marriages, but also considered all labour to be of equal value with the slogan Kāyakavē Kailāsa, 'Work is Worship'. We have seen how the maid servant caṇḍini was given prominence in Basavarāja Vijaya. We have also seen how the consents of Ceṃgaḷe and Cīlāḷa were taken for the killing. Such new interpolations into the story, however, does not alter the structure in such a way that it hampers the continuation of the tradition. Any interpolation into the story, attempts to strengthen the faith among the believers of the religion. Consider for example, the episode no 280 in Śāṃtaliṃgadēśika's Bhairavēśvara Kāvya Kāthamani Sūtraratnākara (AD 1672). During the torrential rains the couple had to feed the gaḷas of Siva. Siriyāḷa brings a big bundle of fuel wood on his back for the cooking. It was raining, he had to cross a chest deep water in the river. Due to the weight of the wood his neck got hurt and he exclaimed Siva by his name haraharā. Siva immediately came to his rescue and gave a support from back to the saint in carrying home the fuel wood. Thus despite change and variation in the story, the essence of the tradition remains intact.

There are certain interesting developments that takes place within the story and in the very names of the characters when the story is developed in the Viraśaiva tradition. For the sake of convenience I have treated all the works of the Kannada, Telugu and Marathi literary sources under this heading. The main reason behind is to stress only the relevant deviations in the story. The contents of the story is fairly consistent in most of the Kannada sources that I have referred. Roghair (1982) mentions that the Telugu *Basava Purāṇamu* (c. AD 1300) of Pāḷkuriki Sōmanātha and *Haravilasāmu* by Srīnatha actually follow the *Periya Purāṇam* version.<sup>8</sup> All the Kannada and Telugu works actually try to stress that Ceṃgaḷe was no less zealous in sacrificing her own so to

Siva. In this sense this is a significant deviation from *Periya Purāṇam*, as the later states that Ciruttoṇḍar conferred with his wife before deciding to tell guest about the meal and the wife even said that they have only one son. In the literary versions in Kannada, Telugu and Marathi, however, several such deviations could be noticed.

The continuity of tradition across the language barriers is an interesting aspect that can be noticed in the transmission of the story. The Tamil haigiographic tradition ends with Śēkkiḷār and we do not find any more Tamil literary sources of Ciruttoṇḍar story there afterwards. However, the Kannada and Telugu Vīraśaiva poets take up the task of keeping up the tradition. As Vīraśaivism spread to Maharashtra, the Marathi poets take up the task of the continuation of the tradition. The story in its folk form as Siriyāla- Cemgaḷe in Karanataka and Maharashtra and as Palnāṭi Vīruni Katha in Telugu, and in a popular form as Siriyāla Seṭṭi Vrata might also have contributed in varying degrees in the diffusion of the story across languages and levels. This can be diagrammatically represented as follows :

Classical/Puranic	Sanskrit			
↑ ↓				
Literary	+	+	+	+
↑ ↓				
Popular	-	+	+	+
↑ ↓				
Folk	-	+	+	+

Tamil ↔ Kannada ↔ Telugu ↔ Marathi

Despite variations in the story, there is a remarkable effort to retain in tact the significantly important features and details of the story. We have already seen how the tiger-skin clad Siva of Nambi transforms into elephant-skin clad Siva in Śēkkiḷār. However, the Vīraśaiva tradition did not discord this important culture specific information which Nambi had given. In Ṣaḍakṣari and Suramga, we have once again the tiger-skin clad Siva instead of the elephant-skin clad one. Jangamas in the tradition wear

a saffron-yellow coloured robe which is perfectly compatible with the colour of the tiger skin. Thus, the structural symboes have been retained intact. The adjectives that Ṣaḍakṣari uses for the three characters reminds us of the descriptions in *Tiruttondar Tiruandādi*.

**Siriyaḷva : vinaya kalāpaṃ, kuladīpan, abhavalāṃchana, dharasēvāpara**

**Cemgale : maṃgaḷamaye, mānini, ciraṃgārcananirate, cature, patibhakti  
samāliṃgite**

**Cilāla : pitṛhṛdayan, amitarucimayakāyakan**

Particularly interesting are the attributions of a donar to Cīruttonḍar stressing his charity and the attribution of having a body which has infinite sweet taste to his son. Nambi uses the attribution 'who is like nector to Lord Shiva' to the child Sirāḷa.

There is also a change in the names of the characters involved in the story. According to *Periya Purāṇam*, the saint's name is Ciruttonḍar, his wife's name is Sandanam and the child's name is Sirāḷa. Surprisingly in the Vīraśaiva literary tradition, these names become Siriyāḷa, Ceṁḡaḷe and Cīlāḷa respectively. The poets in this tradition were clearly aware of the original names of the saint as is evident from the use of either names in the title at least. The difference in the names could be due to the fact the different variant forms of the story might have existed both in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. The name Siriyāḷa could be derived from a linguistic process of Ciru + tonḍar (Small + servant) becoming Tiru + tonḍar (great/sri + servant) in Tamil and was nativized into Kannada as Siri + āḷa (great/sir + servant). Alternatively, we have to believe that the son (Sirāḷa) came into prominence in Tamilnadu during the course of time<sup>9</sup>, which might have prompted the Kannada poets to take that name either intentionally (notice the importance that the son gets in the Kannada versions), or by a confusion. The wife's name in Kannada becomes Ceṁḡaḷe and the son's name Cīlāḷa. The Telugu folk version, however, mentions the names as Cirutoṇḍa Bhaktaḍu, his wife as Siriyāḷa Mangamma and the son as Siriyāḷa Papāyya. Interestingly, Mangamma is a local name for Lakṣmi in Telugu speaking area and Vaiṣṇavite in its association. Pāpa in Telugu and Kannada literally means a baby child. Also notice the popular cult of Siriyāḷa Seṭṭi Vrata and the title Siriyāḷa only to Mangamma and Pāpayya. In the Marathi version of the story, the names have become as Siriyāl (incidentally he is a king here),

Cāṃguṇa and Cilayya. A closer look at the transformation of names suggest not only a change across the linguistic barriers but also an attempt to nativize the names to suit the nomenclature system of the region. Thus, variation exists to suit the needs of the regional culture, but the traditional core still remains intact.

The most striking of the transformation is in the role of Cemṅale, the saint's wife in the story. In this connection Roghair (1982) has already pointed out how the Telugu folk version deviates from the literary versions by giving an emphasis to Mangamma.

In both the Tamil and Telugu written versions of the story, Cirutṇḍa Bhakṭuḍu, the father of Siriyāla Papayya, is the dominant figure. But in the Epic of Palnāḍu oral account, the story takes a different turn. Siriyāla Mangamma unquestionably is the heroine and the dominant individual. It is Mangamma, not her husband, who has the strength and courage to take the life of her son. She herself cooks Siriyāla Pāpayya and serves him to the Jangam. Throughout the story she orders her husband about, almost as one would order a servant. On some occasions she threatens to stop calling him her husband if he fails to do what she tells him. This attitude is, of course antithetical to that of the ideal Brahmin wife. Her female strength and her strength as a devotee contrast with her husband's comparative weakness. (Roghair 1982 : 132)

However, this needs further investigation. It is true that in *Periya Purāṇam* the importance has not been given to the saint's wife Sandanam. In fact, Cirutṇḍar even held a consultation with his wife regarding sacrificing their son. In addition, she even told him 'are we going to sacrifice the only son of the family'. Cirutṇḍar actually convinced her and told her that no one else would willingly give their son for that purpose. It is this hesitation which has been corrected repeatedly to an extent that in later versions the father, wife and the son tries to outwit each other in the killing story. The purpose of the *Periya Purāṇam* was to highlight the devotion of Cirutṇḍar as a devotee. By the time the Viraśaiva poets started writing the story in Kannada and Telugu, there was a need for an attempt to compensate for the hesitation expressed by Sandanam. In the Viraśaiva tradition, we have evidence to show that several of the Iaraḷas, along with their wives participated in the movement. Thus, the wives of the Iaraḷas, commanded equal respect despite their professions. This might have created a need for Cemṅale to be depicted as a wife

who would overwhelmingly get prepared for the sacrifice. It is for this reason that in the story Siriyāḷa has been made to test her. In *Basavarāja Vijaya*, Cemgaḷe even takes a serious objection to the suggestion of her husband that they can get somebody's child for killing and tells him that he has gone mad. This too is antithetical to a Brahmin wife which Roghair (1982) postulates for the Telugu *Basavapurāṇamu* by Pālakuriki Sōmanātha, and the Telugu *Harivilāsamu* by Śrīnātha, and in other Telugu written sources. The versions in the Virāśaiva tradition adheres to the version given *Basavarāja Vijaya*. In fact, the type of female strength that Roghair (1982) finds in the Telugu folk version could be seen in the seed form in the literary versions of Kannada and Telugu. We also have to see the importance given to the low caste Caṇḍini in the Virasaiva tradition. It is true that the Dravidian folk literature gives more weightage to woman and demonstrates her superiority where as her spouse remains relatively inert. However, it is not the type of black and white contrast as Roghair (1982) has observed. The discussion here has demonstrated that it is more like a continuum with the male dominant, inert wife *Periya Purāṇam* version at one end of the continuum, and the male inert female dominant. The Epic of Palnāṭu, at the other extreme end with the intermediate varieties inbetween.

Rogair (1982) also observes that "as integrated into the epic world-view and the Palnāṭu religious climate of today, the story of Cirutoṇḍa Bhaktaṭu has not lost any of its sectarian detail. Nevertheless, its context gives it an essentially non-sectarian import. Bāluṭu is a devotee of Cennakēśvara; his avatār, however, was a radical devotee of Siva. Taken together, the emphasis is on the now prevailing custom of worshipping all gods while at the same time being devoted to one or other." (Roghair 1982 : 125) However, this non-sectarian element, though found today, is actually a characteristic feature of the Bhagavata sect which was very popular in Karnataka and Maharashtra. In fact, this sect tried to mediate between the Saivites and Viśṇavites belonging to the extreme positions. The poets of this sect keeps bringing the names of both Siva and Viṣṇu in their epics. The very name of Harihara represents this concept in an excellent way.

I have tried to suggest that there might have existed several versions of Ciruttoṇḍar-Siriyāḷa both in Tamilnadu and Karnataka where the

earliest hagiographies were written in Tamil and Kannada. My purpose in raising this point is to suggest that in addition to the literary sources, other traditions, folk and popular, also might have contributed to the changes and variations and also in the diffusion of the story. I have already suggested that even before the earliest hagiography in Tamil was written (this holds good for Kannada too), the Viraśaiva Śaraṇas of Karnataka were familiar with the story of Siriyāḷa. Basavaṇṇa has referred to Siriyāḷa in twentyone of his Vacanas and probably, the most frequently referred Nāyanmār in his Vacanas. In one of the Vacanas, Basavaṇṇa refers to several of his predecessors. What is interesting here is that while all the others are the Nūtana śaraṇas (his contemporaries), Siriyāḷa is the only Nāyanmār (purātana śaraṇa) referred in the Vacana.

Sṛṭṭyem̐bene Siriyāḷana  
 maḍivāḷanem̐bene Mācayyana  
 dōḥaranem̐bene Kakkayyana  
 mādāranem̐bene Cannayyana  
 ānu ḥāruvanem̐dare Kūḍalasam̐gayya naguvanayyā  
 How can I call Siriyāḷa a merchant by caste  
 Mācayya a washerman  
 Kakkayya a cobbler  
 and Channayya a scavenger.  
 Kūḍalasam̐gamayya will laugh at me  
 if I call myself a Brahmin (Vacana no. 344, Hiremath 1968a)

The Kannada Viraśaiva poets too, appear to have been fascinated by the story of Siriyāḷa. In addition to the list given above, there are at least seven independent works depicting the life of Siriyāḷa :

Siriyāḷasetṭiyasāṃgatya	Sāṃgatya	Maḥādēva	c. AD. 1650
Siriyāḷasetṭiyaregaḷe	Ragaḷe	—	—
Siriyāḷasetṭiyaregaḷe	Ragaḷe	—	—
Siriyāḷasetṭiyavārdhaka	Ṣaṭpadi	—	—
Siriyāḷasatvapaṇkṣe	—	Ṣāṃtakavi	—
Siriyāḷanacaritre	—	Maḥaṃtadēsika	—
Siriyāḷā rāja	—	Jayarāmācārya	—

Most of these works are, however, unpublished, and of a much later period, and except for demonstrating the popularity of the story, I do not want to go into the details.



The Vacana referred above clearly demonstrates the popularity of Siriyāḷa in Karanataka at that time. The other Vacanas of Basavaḷḷa which makes a reference Siriyāḷa refers to the different aspects of the story.

- 146 : What is Bhakti  
the one which Siriyāḷa demonstrated
- 147 : I am scared of him (Siva)  
ever since he begged for the son of Siriyāḷa
- 149 : Believe him firmly, believe him firmly  
like Siriyāḷa and Cemgaḷe did
- 151 : O Kūḍalasamgamadēva  
how did all the men and women around Siriyāḷa and Cemgaḷe become gods
- 152 : Look at it women,  
the black metal  
having bound in a bundle of touch stones  
became the precious gold by itself
- Oh mother Cemgaḷe, tell me  
those people who lived in the seven streets where you lived  
did they take a vow to the Linga for what they got
- Did they give a gift of Cīlaḷa to Kūḍalasamgamadēva  
for they got in return
- 316 : Could any one other than Siriyāḷa bear with  
the troubles with which Kūḍalasamgayya haunted him
- 317 : Siriyāḷa the servant of god  
does not know any cheating  
in thought, word and deed
- 319 : Oh God, will I be able to feed you like Siriyāḷa did
- 320 : Having given the life of his son (to Siva)  
Siriyāḷadēva, got the Prāṇa Prasāda itself
- 344 : How can I call Siriyāḷa a merchant by caste  
Mācayya a washerman

Kakkayya a cobbler  
and Channayya a scavenger.  
Kūḍalasamgamayya will laugh at me if I call myself a Brahmin.

- 351 : My Eldest sister  
cooks a feast in Kāṃci  
and you still say that I do not have any relatives
- 432 : He begged for the son of Siriyāḷa, didn't he
- 434 : This great god, he begged for the son of Siriyāḷa
- 443 : I would have called you a god  
had you taken the entire city of Kāṃci to Kailasa  
before begging for the son of Siriyāḷa
- 621 : Many men perished on the earth  
having given presents to the Brahmins  
The enemy of Kama, came in the form of a Jangama  
and begged for the son of Siriyāḷa  
and having given his son  
Siriyāḷa, the merchant  
took the entire Kāṃcīpura to Kailasa
- 638 : The couples Siriyāḷa and Ceṃgaḷe  
Did they forego their rati  
to get what ever they got
- 679 : People bet on sugarcane  
they do not bet on their own body, do they?  
Kūḍalasamgamadēva, for the gamble for which you invited  
Siriyāḷa, he bet on it, and did win it.
- 680 : Siriyāḷa only gave his son and not himself
- 739 : Is it a pride for you  
you begged Siriyāḷa for his son
- 740 : You got a curry made out of Siriyāḷa's son  
then you troubled him further by refusing to eat it
- 741 : Kūḍalasamgayyā, I realised from Siriyāḷa  
what the world actually is



It can be seen that the city Kāṁcīpura, the name of the couple, Siriyāḷa and Cēṁgaḷe, the entire city going to Kailāsa along with the couple and even the folk version's element that Siva came in the form of a Jangama, all these elements which formed an integral part of the Siriyāḷa stories in the Viraśaiva tradition were clearly present during the time of Basavaṇṇa himself. How did all these elements get diffused despite the absence of a literary hagiography both in Tamil and Kannada. The answer lies most probably, in the presence of the cult of Siriyāḷa being active in the folk and popular traditions both in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Obviously, the version with which Basavaṇṇa was familiar must have come to him from such versions. This also satisfactorily accounts for the variations that exist in the Viraśaiva tradition of the story. Pāḷkurike Sōmanātha mentions that he wrote his *Basava Purāṇamu* based on such existing oral traditions. Infact, in Tamilnadu itself the story of the sacrifice of the only son by Ciruttoṇḍar and his family was sanctified and had become worthy of worship has been pointed out by Dehejia (1988 : ??) :

Independent shrines to the saint and to his blessed son Sirāḷa were constructed in the tenth century as we know from an inscription recording gifts for lighting the lamps in the shrines. In the year AD 998 three small copper images of the Siruttoṇḍar family was dedicated to the Tanjore temple... Siruttoṇḍar festivals were celebrated yearly and an inscription of the year AD 1003 tells us of the image of Sirāḷa being carried in procession from the Sirāḷa shrine to the Siruttoṇḍar temple. Later records detail the laying out of a special route for his procession, and inscriptions also speak of festival to mark the occasion when Siva gave salvation to Siruttoṇḍar.

It is evident now from the description that the story had transformed into a folk temple cult and had its annual festival. The very fact that the son Sirāḷa had been deified and elevated to the level of a god with an independent temple also suggests how the name Siriyāḷa changed its association in the Viraśaiva tradition from the son to the father. It is this cult that Basavaṇṇa was aware of and hence the change and variations were in the story. The Viraśaiva tradition propagated its own ideals through the story. However, Telugu and Kannada folk cults emerged and gave different versions to the story of Siriyāḷa. It is also possible

that the elements of the story that Basavaṇṇa has referred in his Vacanas came from the folk cult itself. Notice the similarity between the lepor Jangama of the Telugu folk version and to the reference to Siva as Jangama in Vacana No. 621. In addition there is also a version of the story available to us at a popular level in the form of Vrata Kathā. It is a belief in Karnataka that the couple who dose not have children will get a child if they perform the Siryāḷa seṭṭi vrata. All these things point out the dynamics of continuity of tradition at several levels despite change and variation with in the tradition. It also suggests that literary channels need not have to be the only channels in the transmission of tradition; tradition is a multichanneled communication. Even in the absence of literary texts folk and popular cults can transmit and diffuse the literary materials and other values of the tradition in their own capacity.

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## NOTES

1. This is clearly evident from the fact that later on the life of sixty-three Nāyanmārs was codified into *Lingya Purāṇa*. Scholars are of the opinion that the version available in *Lingya Purāṇa* appears to have been based on the version available in Upamanyu's *Bhaktivilāsa*. Suranga, a sixteenth century Kannada poet who wrote *Trīṣaṣṭipūratanaṅgaritram*, mentions the *Lingya Purāṇa* and *Bhaktivilāsa* as the sources for his works. It is interesting to note here that despite his following the earlier Kannada works, he seems to be attempting to gain prestige and authenticity to his work by mentioning to the Sanskrit sources. The very choice of Campu as the medium of his work and the title adds further evidence to this point. In addition to *Lingya Purāṇa* and *Bhaktivilāsa*, Nīlakamṭha Nāgānātha's *Vīraṇāḥṣvārācāra Saṅgraha*, the Sanskrit *Basava Purāṇa* by an Arādhyā from Rūr and *Hālāsya Mahātmyam* are the other Sanskrit sources where the Ciruttoṇḍar-Siriyāla story could be found.

2. The copper plates of Vēlūrupālaya (SH II.96) too substantiates this point.

3. *Truttoṇḍar Togai in Agatiyār Tēvaart Tirūṭṭu*, with a commentary by Kayappakam Sadashive Cettiyaar. Tinnevely : The South India saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society. 1925.

4. The earliest Sanskrit source containing the stories of the Nāyanmārs are the ninth Kāṇḍa in Sivaraḥasya, Upamanyu's *Bhaktivilāsa* and *Lingya Purāṇa*. There is also a Sanskrit version of the *Bāṣava Purāṇa* by Kamei Samkararya in which the stories of the sixty-three Nāyanmārs can be found.

5. It should be noted here that these two things which are normally done on a day of festival and forbidden on the days of death, pollution and on the Śraddha days.

6. Gundappa (1974) observes that the number sixty-three curiously agrees with the sixty-three Śālākāpuruṣas of the Jains. There is also a reference to the sixty-three gaṇas of Siva in the Śaiva āgamas.

7. This is evident from the point that interpolations to Harihara's have been clearly identified by Devirappa (1968). He has convincingly pointed out that the author Siriyāla's ragale is not Harihara.

8. However, this appears to be slightly overstated. Siva appears as a Jangama lepor in the version stated by Roghair appears to confirm only with the folk version in the Epic of Palnāḍu. The literary versions in Tamil, Kannada and Telugu mention that Siva appeared in the form of a Bhairava. In the Marathi version given by Śrīdhara in *Śivalilāmṛta*, Siva appears as a person dressed in torn clothes. In addition, there are several differences among *Periya Purāṇam*, and the Kannada and Telugu versions.

9. We have evidence to show the worship of the idol of the child Sirāḷa was in practice in the temples of Tanjore.

## **NABAGUNJARA IN ORIYA LITERATURE AND PAINTING**

Sarala Das, the first major Oriya poet who lived in 15th century, wrote the Mahābhārata and few other *purāṇas* in Oriya. His Mahābhārata remains the most detailed and authentic account of Oriya culture till date even after five centuries. It is a unique creation in the sense that except the broad story-line it is very different from the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. All its characters and events have been Oriyanised by Sarala Das to such an extent that Panigrahi (1975, 1989) a front-ranking historian of Orissa, has done the commendable job of reconstructing the then Orissan history from it. In the 'Madhyaparba' of this Mahābhārata, Krishna has been described to have taken the form of a strange and unheard-of animal called *nabagunjara* to find out if Arjuna can recognise him in this form or not. Though the description of this animal is given in four couplets only, there is hardly any Oriya who does not know this episode. In the present paper we intend to discuss how this animal called *nabagunjara* came into existence in Oriya culture and literature, and then its influence on the *paṭa* paintings of Puri, Orissa. But before that we should have an idea about the development of animal-worship among humans, and let us begin with it.

According to the Kathopanishad, when the Brahmin boy, Nachiketa, asks Yama to reveal the mystery as to what happens to one's soul after death the latter gets surprised at the deep knowledge of the former and offers him everything else except what he has asked for. But due to Nachiketa's undeterred firmness Yama is forced to tell him that 'soul' is something that has neither birth nor death. The body perishes, but the soul is imperishable. Knowledge of the soul is the real knowledge.

Now the problem is how man, to be specific primitive man, began to perceive the immortality of soul. It is needless to say that he must have formed an idea of god before thinking about the soul and Nature must have made him realize that there is some other power beyond him. As a result, he must have seen what he never saw before in the objects

like fire, wind, sun, moon, sky, and the like. After that he must have wondered as to how and why he comes to this world, lives for some years, and then dies. There is little doubt that it was death that frightened him the most and forced him to ponder about it. Probably this is the reason for which most of early man's intellectual exercises is devoted to discussion on death. What was baffling for him was that another person, who was doing every thing like him until the other moment, all of a sudden becomes devoid of speech, sight and movement. He could reason out that something that was within the other person's body earlier was no longer there. This 'something', i.e. life or soul has been identified differently by different people all over the world. The Greeks, the Jews, the Arabs among others used to believe that 'blood' was the life. There were others who identified 'heart' with life. Then some others, like the Indians, identified 'breath' with life. The Sanskrit word *prāṇa*, which means both life and breath, is derived from the root /an/ meaning 'wind'. Among the Dravidian languages, Tamil has *uyir*, Malayalam *uyir* and *usir*, Kannada *usir* and Telugu *usuru* to designate breath and life both. It is important to note that breath, unlike blood and heart, does not perish. From this must have stemmed the idea that life or soul is immortal and imperishable. This must have led man to believe in the continuity of life and imperishability of soul. After that he must have started meditating upon the life before and the life after the one he is living. Scholars have tried to account for it through the concepts like totemism and animism.

Though worship of animals, trees and other objects is found all over the world, this is more widely prevalent in India. In fact, for an Indian everything is sacred. "It might even be affirmed that the Hindus were the first believers in the law of continuity; for in their creed the life of gods is connected with that of demons, the life of demons with that of men, the life of men with that of animals, the life of animals with that of plants, the life of plants with a supposed life in rocks and stones, and the divine soul is thought to permeate all". (Williams 1974 : 330-1). With reference to animals in the Indian context, we know that the first three incarnations of Vishnu are animals like fish, tortoise, and boar : and the fourth one, a manimal, i.e. a man-lion. Again, Buddha is described in the Jataka stories to have lived as animals in his earlier



lives. All these clearly imply that animals occupy a very important place in the Hindu religion and society. For this reason, Williams (1974 : 315) states, "It is difficult, as we have seen, to draw a line of demarcation between gods, men, animals. If men depend on animals, so also do the gods ; if men are associated with animals, so also are the gods." According to him, there are mainly three reasons for the widespread animal worship in India : First, animals possess superhuman courage and strength. Second, they are regarded as the incarnations of different deities. Third, they are accepted as totems and animas by different peoples of India.

As one can see these three reasons are interrelated and interdependent. In other words, since animals are endowed with superhuman courage and strength they are accepted as gods, and that is why people claim and derive lineage from them. We would like to note here that the Indian identity, whether it is at the level of culture or literature or language, is the result of a synthesis of the three major families, i.e. Aryan, Dravidian, and Munda. It should be pointed out that animal worship was not a characteristic of the Aryans when they came to India around 2000 B.C. On the other hand, both the Dravidians and the Mundas show evidence of animal worship right from the beginning. So the logical conclusion that can be drawn is that the Aryans have assimilated this practice of the Dravidians and the Mundas through contact and convergence.

Central India, to be specific Orissa, occupies a strategic place in the cultural, literary and linguistic history of India ; because this is the meeting place of the above said three families, i.e. Aryan, Dravidian and Munda. The dominant language of Orissa is Oriya which belongs to the Aryan family. Then at least 8 out of some 24 Dravidian languages in total and at least 10 out of some 16 Munda languages in total are spoken within the borders of this state. This would give a clear hint of the range of convergence between the Aryan and the non-Aryan, i.e. Dravidian and Munda cultures and languages within the boundaries of Orissa.

It has been mentioned earlier that the description of *nabagunjara* is confined only to four couplets in the 'Madhyaparba' of Sarala Das's Mahābhārata. In order to introduce the *nabagunjara*, the poet has made use of the well-known episode of sharing of Draupadi by the five Pandava brothers which runs as follows :

The Pandavas take a vow before the fire-god that if anyone of them by chance sees the other sharing an intimate moment with Draupadi, then the former must go to exile for 12 years. One day when Yudhisthira was with Draupadi, the fire-god comes in a Brahmin's disguise and asks Arjuna to bring the former on the pretext that he has to say something confidential and important to him. He also warns Arjuna that if the latter does not obey his order immediately, then Hastinapura will be burnt. So to avoid the calamity on Hastinapura Arjuna goes to Yudhisthira to tell him about the Brahmin's visit and finds him in an intimate position with Draupadi. Then as per the promise he goes to exile. Krishna comes to know it when he visits Hastinapura after Arjuna has spent 4 years 6 months and 13 days in forest. He finds out from Sahadeva that Arjuna is on the Manibhadra mountain and asks Garuda to take him there. Having reached this mountain he wants to test Arjuna's bhakti for him and transforms himself into a *nabagunjara*. He is *Nabagunjara* because different parts of his body are taken from nine different animals including man, like head from a rooster, neck from a peacock, hunch from a bull, waist from a lion, tail from a snake, three legs from an elephant, a tiger and a horse, and the fourth leg is a man's hand with a lotus. As Arjuna is busy making his bow he does not pay attention to this strange animal. So the latter begins to dance on dry leaves and creepers, jumps from one place to another, rolls on the ground in order to draw Arjuna's attention. At last, Arjuna looks at him and gets surprised to see such an animal for the first time in his life. But he immediately realizes that it cannot be anybody else except Krishna himself. So he prostrates and prays him, and the latter cannot help but appears in his original form.



Arjuna in folded hands before the *nabagunjara* (Pata painting, Puri)



It is clear from the above description that *nabagunjara* consists of two parts, like *naba* 'nine' and *gunjara* which in all probability is a Munda word that has two constituents like *gun* 'any natural inherent power or efficacy', and *hara* 'man' and thus it means 'people with magical powers' (Hoffmann 1932 : 1525). In other words, our contention is that *gunhara* has become *gunjara* in the course of time. Further, it should be noted that all the eight animals described above are worshiped as totems by various Dravidian and Munda tribes of Central India. For example, rooster is worshiped by the Dravidian Devanga tribe; peacock by the Dravidian Bhil and Khond and the Munda Mundari tribes; bull by the Dravidian Gond tribe; lion by the Dravidian Khangra tribe; snake by the Dravidian Bhil, Oraon, Khond, and the Munda Savara, Mundari, Santhal, Kharia, Bhumij, Korwa tribes; elephant by the Dravidian Arakh and the Mund Mundari, Kharia, Juang tribes; tiger by the Dravidian Bhil, Gond, Oraon and Munda Kharia, Mundari, Juang and Korwa tribes; and horse by the Dravidian Chenchu, Khangra and Arakh tribes. Besides these, there are also a lot of other unclassified tribes of non-Aryan origin that worship the said animals (Frazer 1986 : 219-235, 292-316). The point which is extremely important is that in his *Mahābhārata* Sarala Das has described Oriya culture as a symbiosis of the Aryan and the non-Aryan cultures. In addition to giving utmost importance to Lord Jagannath, who is originally a Savara (Munda) God, throughout the *Mahābhārata*, he has portrayed the Savaras as the sons of Lord Madhava in 'Mūsaṁparba'. Not only that, he has also made Madhava to stay amidst the Savaras in the form of Savari Narayana. In the same 'Mūsaṁparba' King Indradrumana has invited a Savara chieftain named Jara for worshipping Krishna's body together. Again after Krishna's body appeared in the *Rohiṇīkuṇḍa* as a log of sandal wood, Krishna has been made to tell King Indradrumana in his dream that even if all the people of the kingdom try they would not be able to lift the log; only Jara Savara and Basu Brahmin jointly can do so.

All these and many other such examples in Sarala Das's *Mahābhārata* strongly evidence that his approach was symbiotic. So we want to argue that *nabagunjara* is a result of this symbiosis. In other words, by way of putting the parts of the above mentioned eight animals together into a cohesive form and describing it as Lord Krishna in disguise, Sarala

Das has legitimized the contribution of the so-called venial or 'little' non-Aryan religions and cultures to the religion and culture of Orissa.

Though the description of *nabagunjara* is very short in the Mahābhārata, it has been extremely successful in attracting attention of the Oriya painters in general and *pata* painters of Puri in particular. No *pata* painter feels contented unless and until he completes a painting of *nabagunjara*.

It should also be mentioned that the *pata* painters use natural colours one of which is *pacā* designating 'green'. Interestingly, *pacā* is a Dravidian word that originally referred to both 'green' and 'yellow'. *Pata* itself is a Dravidian word meaning 'silk' and *pata* painting, of course, is done on silk cloth only. Not only these, we have also been utterly surprised by the striking similarities between the *pata paintings* of Puri and the *kalamakāri* paintings of Andhra Pradesh. All these have led us to believe that both the varieties of painting have originated from one and the same source, which is most probably Dravidian. But a thorough comparative study is required to put it on firm grounds. Neither we have the scope to do it in this paper nor are we adequately trained to venture for such an exercise.

## NOTE

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## POPULAR LITERATURE: A FIEDLERIAN PERSPECTIVE

Leslie Fiedler is one of the most controversial, contemporary figures on the American literary scene, and has held the chair of the Samuel Clemens Professor at the State University of New York, Buffalo, for around three decades. Possessed of a robust and a passionate intellect, he is known as an unorthodox and provocative interpreter of American literature. Over the years, in spite of much hostile criticism, Fiedler has managed a cozy and significant place amongst the American intelligentsia.

Since the publication of Fiedler's first critical anthology, *An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (1955) and *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) to date, Fiedler has proved to be a thought-provoking, non-academic scholar. His work has shocked as well as amused the critics of American literary establishment, earning him epithets such as brilliant, exasperating, kitsch, mischievous, outspoken, intellectually sadistic, etc. Critics have also examined him and his writings from various angles: as an iconoclast, a mythmaker, a champion of the Jews, a naysayer, and an advocate of popular culture and literature.

By using such embarrassingly popular texts, such as *Gone With the Wind*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Moby Dick*, in a theory of literature that was at once disturbing, and profound, Fiedler has administered a brisk tremor and shaking to the staid and comfortable world of American literary establishment. His essay, 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in Huck Honey', has been called notorious and written in bad taste, and his book *No! In thunder* has aroused much negative criticism. Actually the so-called offensive (then) essay on homosexuality, 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in Huck Honey', which in retrospect seems harmless, should have been a sure signpost for the future direction of his writings. But before I plunge any further into Fiedler's perspectives on Popular Literature, I would like to elaborate upon some of the important influences, exponents and tenets of Popular Culture.

There is a very high correlation between a man's occupation, his socio-economic status, the kind of music that appeals to him, the kind of cinema that is likely to get his patronage, and so on and so forth. Education alone cannot direct a man's preferences completely. "Popular" comes from the Greek word "populus", which means people. So popular culture is people's culture, which affects ninety per cent of the people, ninety per cent of the time. Some of the famous exponents of popular culture, who are also Fiedler's contemporaries, are Ray B. Browne, Marshall Fishwick, Bruce Ludke, John Cawelti, Russel B. Nye, C.W.E. Bigsby, to name a few. All these critics have tried to define various facets of popular culture.

Browne gives an extremely succinct and wholesome definition, that popular culture is actually all those components of life itself which are not only narrowly intellectual or creatively elitist but which are also generally, though not necessarily, disseminated through the popular media. He uses the symbol of the eyeball. On the one end is folk culture; on the other, elite culture; in the middle, constituting the largest portion is the iris, in which rests the pupil-popular culture—ever expanding, ever growing and always seeing more widely, intently and deeply. And the eyeball is horizontal, not vertical. Hence it is inappropriate to think of one culture as "high" and another as "low".

Another very important aspect of popular culture, again in the words of Browne, is that it '...Provides a kind of audio-video profile of a nation. It pictures the smiles and it echoes the sighs of contentment. It also points to the locations of fissures in the crust of society through which seethes and explodes the lava of public discontent' (4.6). Advocates of popular culture insist that popular culture is essential for the health of academics. It can be used to counter the hocus-pocus of academia that represents literacy and education in general.

Not only this, popular culture is the practical-pragmatic humanities. It can be used as a tool to assist in education. It can be utilized in numerous ways to encourage learning, to overcome illiteracy, to retain people in school, and to energize our educational system. Actually popular culture is a derivative of the sum total of our experiences and thinking and our attitudes towards life. It is the environment around us, the culture we inherit, the culture we transmit to our descendents. Popular

culture is the television we watch, the cinema we give patronage to, the type of food—fast, junk, or conventional, that we eat, the type of attire we wear, the music we appreciate, the things we spend money on, in short, the whole society we live in. It is virtually our comprehensive, cogent and cohesive world in all its dimensions.

Fishwick's 'Confessions of an Ex-Elitist' is a candid expression of how a person changes his attitude toward "elite" culture and eventually becomes an exponent of "Popular Culture". In *Parameters of Popular Culture* (1974), Fishwick refers to popular culture as a new international style that has emerged in the late twentieth century. This trend, according to him, is far more pervasive and spontaneous than the earlier ones (classical, gothic, romantic and modern), and it transcends national, class, language and racial barriers. This new trend has been widely acclaimed all over the world. Students proclaim it in the streets of Paris, New Delhi and New York. Under this broad umbrella are those works and events (both artistic and commercial) which are designed for mass consumption and to cater to the taste of the majority. Fishwick further points out the most important tenet of popular culture: "Entertainment is the key, and money is the spur..." (18,1).

Contrasting popular culture with private (elite) culture, Fishwick writes that private culture is for the select few, popular is for all. Popular art says relax, private art says stretch. Popular art tends to be neither complicated nor profound, private art attempts to be both. The question that haunts all critics is: who is to determine what is "high" and what is "low" ? Fishwick says that the "vulgar" music of the Beatles became "classic" a decade later. The fact that Shakespeare wrote for the pit, and that he knew "little Latin and less Greek" does not seem to have blunted his influence over the masses, over the years. Endless bickering about mob taste, mass audiences, and elitism, critics note, has ranked as the most wasteful activity on the contemporary American scene. (18 2)

In contemporary usage, pop means three things, according to Fishwick:

1. New, faddish, "in". To be "popular" is to be among the "top ten", a pace-setter (the operative word is "ephemeral"; in today, out tomorrow).



2. Vernacular, folksy, earthy. To be "popular" is to bypass the elite and appeal to the ordinary man who is rooted in real life. (One detects some reverse snobbism and anti-intellectualism here.)

3. Universal-electronic-instant. To be "popular" is to be plugged in, via film, television, tape, e-mail, internet.

Fishwick traces the common denominators in the above three. He says that popular culture is an unflinching look at the real world today; a fascination with an acceptance of our mechanized, trivialized, urbanized environment; a mirror held up to life, full of motion and madness. It is rooted in new factors—physical and social mobility, mass production, abundance, anxiety. Communication, which is the basic need of academics in general, is fulfilled by popular culture.

With a view to familiarize the readers with various facts of popular culture and its multiple definitions, I have enumerated some of the important dimensions of this ever-expanding phenomenon of culture. This is all the more pertinent at this juncture, as I shall be treating Fiedler's perspectives on popular literature within the framework of popular culture.

In 'Giving the Devil His Due', Fiedler prefers to define popular culture as modern majority culture. He confesses that "...literature is what I know about, literature is what I am interested in, literature is what I am committed to" (12, 197). And Fiedler restricts himself to popular song and story, mostly story, which, in his opinion, is popular literature. In 'Toward a Definition of Popular Literature', Fiedler says, "...by 'popular' I do not mean necessarily or primarily what is most widely read, much less what is read by 'everybody' ; and by 'literature' I do not mean what is customarily 'studied' in classes in literature" (7, 28). By popular literature Fiedler implies that literature which has been "ghetto-ized" or excluded from university education, but has endured on its own. He adds that popular literature is not a category, a type, a sub-genre, the invention of the authors of the books, who, we have been taught to believe, belong to popular literature. In fact, it exists primarily "...in the perception of elitist critics—or better, perhaps, in their mis-perception, their—usually tendentious, sometimes even deliberate—misapprehension" (7, 30). Both these essays, 'Toward a Definition of Popular Literature' and 'Giving the Devil His Due'

constitute an important landmark in Fiedler's evolution as a Pop Guru.

Such an example of high art which crosses over to popular art is Japanese art pictures called "Ukiyoe", according to Fiedler. Ukiyoe, or floating word pictures, possess the merits of high art. An ancient Japanese art form, Ukiyoe is printed from wooden blocks in several colours, and they portray well-known prostitutes and popular actors or, as the Japanese would say, "bijin", i.e. "a beautiful person". Fiedler removes the discrepancy surrounding this art form and says, "Popular is too ambiguous a word to trust, for two of its commonest meanings are middlebrow and folk. But Ukiyoe is lowbrow and urban—a mass-produced art of the city (9,11).

As we have already noted in all his writings, Fiedler gives exceptional significance to myths and myth criticism. On the one hand, myth wipes out the gulf that divides elite culture from pop; on the other hand, Fiedler uses myth, as a bridge, to move to and fro, into the realms of the elite and the pop culture and elite to pop culture and vice versa. Moreover, myth, with its tenacity and capability of being present in elite culture as well as in the popular, apparently destroys the barrier that separates one from the other. For Fiedler, myth is the only consistent agent which universalizes all literature into a mythic whole. His own readers, hence, will recognize that he usually concentrates on the mythic element which is indifferent to medium, and insouciant to the various highs and lows of culture. He relates popular art to myth: Popular art... lives only by its mythic appeal, its ability to find, once and for all, the pattern of story and image which will transmit to simple people what they need to know without making them aware that they are learning anything. I think it would not be inept to say that it is very difficult to find out which is the larger concern of Fiedler's writings, myth or popular culture. Both play a game of hide-and-seek and eventually merge into each other. But, a little more thought would reveal another startling fact. As Fiedler and his fellow critics rightly say, popular culture and myths both jointly appeal to the primordial instincts of man and cater to a vast segment of society. Hence, Fiedler's concern with myths gets assimilated into his larger concern of today: popular culture.

Fiedler, in his talk with DeMott, beautifully links up ancient myths and science fiction. Fiedler says that science fiction refuses to draw lines between the 'real' and the 'hallucinatory'. It is all part of the destruction of the old secular notions and the reintroduction of the mythological. Paradoxically, myths also permeate science fiction. Despite its newness or modern look, science fiction draws upon myths for its popular appeal. Giving the example of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the two movies which made a mark in the contemporary scientific world, he says that the science in them is pure pretense. In *Star Wars*, the scientific apparatus gives us an excuse to get back to certain tales of mystery and adventure that thrilled us when we were little kids. *Close Encounters* had almost a religious or a supernatural note, which is not explained by the real details of anything in the plot or the scientific machinery. It's in the tone. DeMott further says that our minds have been opened up again in the age where the marvellous was accepted i.e., the past.

In the essay, 'Giving the Devil His Due', he says that popular literature "...contains communal dreams, shared myths or archetypes. And it is distinguished by the mythopoeic colour of its creators, their ability to sense what already existed in the popular mind, rather than by any unique vision or ability in executive skills. For this reason popular works of literature tend to pass immediately into the public domain" (12, 199). Thus, according to Fiedler, characters of popular works immediately enter the public domain like Pickwick, Don Quixote, Sherlock Holmes and David Copperfield, etc. In fact, Fiedler says that one of the distinctions between popular and high literature can be made on the basis that certain books and authors are remembered like Hemingway and his works and Faulkner and his works, but their characters are forgotten; on the other hand, Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan are familiar household names even with those people who haven't heard of Conan Doyle or Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creators of these two popular figures in fiction.

Moreover, popular literature never seems the kind of literature that you are reading for the first time (12, 200) since it dramatizes communal myths and dreams of time immemorial. Hence such literature is also independent of its author, text and medium. Popular literature never really

belonged to one medium; it never was just "words on the page", says Fiedler. He puts it succinctly that all literature is finally, essentially, "...images in the head. Once its images pass through words... into our heads, such primordial images or archetypes or myths... can pass out again easily into any other medium. They can be portrayed on the stage; they can be painted; they can be sculpted in stone; they can be turned into stained glass windows, they can be carved in soap" (12, 201). Here, Fiedler implies that such works will retain "...their authenticity and the resonance of feeling that was originally connected with them" (12, 201). Further, such popular literature is driven, says Fiedler, by the masses to pass in other forms of media. Taking the example of *Gone with the Wind* and *Roots* as novel and movie and play, Fiedler says that though they depict opposite views of slavery and Reconstruction yet "...in the realm of popular Art, what matters is the stirring up of the collective unconscious, the evocation of closely shared nightmares of race and sex; the dramas of protecting little sister against the rapist, whoever she may be and whatever color; Black/White, White/Black. You can mix them and match them, it makes no difference to popular appeal. Is it white innocence assaulted by black bestiality? Is it black innocence assaulted by white brutality? The audience loves it in any case" (12, 203).

Hence, according to him, popular literature is neither good nor bad—it is beyond good and evil. It not only brings together the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated, male and female, children and adults, but it also joins you with your worst enemies and your worst self. Fiedler says, "When I think of the books I have loved best in my life, I realize that what I admire in them is what I love in pop art at its most gross, vagrant, vulgar, brutal and unrefined: the mythopoeic power of the author... what really moves us to transport—what Longinus called Ekstasis—taking us out of our heads and out of our bodies, out of our normal consciousness is the ability of all great books, great pop books, great elite books, to turn us once again into savages and children: and releasing us thus from bondage not merely to the restrictions of conscience or super-egos, but to consciousness and rationality, what is to say, the ego itself" (12, 206).

Treating popular literature, as commodity literature dependent upon the market place, Fiedler says, "If the mother of popular literature is

mass production technology, the midwife which gives it birth, and the wet-nurse which suckles it is the 'free enterprise market-place' (7, 29). Sometimes literature which cannot be stopped from attaining market-place success is denied to university classrooms and libraries, because the notion floated by elitist critics, according to Fiedler, is that the art forms preferred by majority of people cannot be admirable and worthy of receiving serious attention, and that "... there is an inverse relationship between literary merit and market-place success" (7, 29). Fiedler reiterates his point that these guardians of "good" taste, "ghettoize" certain writers, even before reading their works. In the United States, says the critic, certain professionals have been trained to do this job for the rest of the people. Even librarians "ghettostacks" these books as "Juveniles" "Teenage Fiction" or relegate some to a "super ghetto" (7, 31) called "Pornography". Such books are never even thought to be considered for any major prize, bemoans a bitter Fiedler. He calls this an "untouchable category" (7, 30-31). Fiedler blames this pre-censorship to the "unworkable system" evolved by a select few in the American literary world.

Fiedler further points out the plight of those "borderline writers" embarrassingly pop but endowed with energy and skill, invention and mythopoeic power. Fiedler talks of Dickens and Twain, Cooper and Richardson. In a very satirical manner, he writes that for such writers, "elitist standards" have been bent a little, shame-facedly adjusted or hypocritically ignored (7, 32). Fiedler tries to give a plausible explanation: the insecurity of their own literary merits does not let these elitist critics give up categories of high and low, which are clearly not viable.

This "priestly brotherhood of critics" (7, 36) evolved a new canon of literature which would exclude philistine, vulgar, trivial or popular works enjoyed by the majority. Hence, Fiedler joins the band of those critics who have become advocates of opening up the canon of American literature. These critics try to prove that university is not the chief, almost the sole guardian of "taste" and "standards". It is the majority taste that defines literature. "Ekstasis" and not "instruction" will be the concern of the artist who will speak less of theme and purpose, structure and texture, ideology and significance, irony and symbolism,



and more of myth, fable, archetype, fantasy, magic, and wonder, says Fiedler.

In the earlier essay, 'Toward a Definition of Popular Literature', Fiedler had talked of "Ekstatis". In this essay, 'Giving the Devil his Due,' he develops the term and explains that it stands for the therapeutic function of art, called by various names. Aristotle called it "Catharsis"; later prophets call it "Alteration of consciousness", or "desublimation" or "regression in the service of ego." Fiedler, finally, says that "...the chief value of majority literature is to remind us of what all literature is really about" (12, 207) and literature "...teaches us to remain faithful to our animal existence, to those dark Gods, dark only because we have shrouded them, to the dark side of our deepest ambivalence towards our mates, towards our children, towards our secret selves, towards the daylight deities we are proud to boast we honour alone" (12, 207). And popular arts are, says Fiedler, "...a way of giving the devil his due. And that due we must give him or die" (12, 207).

A major work of this period is *Freaks: Myths & Images of the Secret Self* (1978). The book is a commentary on Nature's outsiders. Here, the relevance of this book increases manifold as it traces the "other" from the classical times to the present era of popular culture: films, theatre, soap-operas and arts like painting, music and sculpture. All deal with the freak as—an intermediary between men and animals or sometimes men and gods, as a source of good luck, or a showpiece and means of entertainment. Fiedler projects the freak as a symbol of the human condition, of the alienated man, finally as a symbol of the future possibilities of man. Fiedler speaks of the "freak" as a mutant—a changed attitude which may be suitable to the new world. He traces it in movies, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Frankenstein's monster, Dracula; and images in popular music from Frank Zappa to the Rolling Stones. This book is highly provocative, illustrative and interesting and one of the artifacts of today's popular literature. DeMott, in 'A Talk with Leslie Fiedler', discloses Fiedler's special concern with the youth culture, myths and popular culture. The conversation, in turn, makes an interesting commentary by DeMott and Fiedler both, on the literature and the literary trends of the late seventies. In addition to this, a discussion on *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* makes some interesting disclosures.

According to DeMott, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* is seen as a book about myths, marginal human beings (and) deep-structure psychological motifs. Nevertheless, Fiedler has a different viewpoint. According to him it is an iconic book which takes off from medical texts, comic books, popular music, movies and illustrative pictures. It's not just a conventional proper literary work.

*The Inadvertent Epic From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots* is another work in the long tradition of writings in which Fiedler examines popular works like *Gone with the Wind*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Roots* which are subversive to the anti-family myth, and have a potent grasp on popular imagination. According to Barry Hayne, *The Inadvertent Epic From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots* is the obverse of the theme of *Love and Death in the American Novel*, in which he traces the myth of the runaway American male fleeing domesticity, civilization and women into the company of a non-white male, in the primeval world of forest and water. *The Inadvertent Epic From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots* scrutinizes not a male, subversive, anti-family myth (*Love and Death in the American Novel*) but a feminine society, a domestic and familial one. While defining this other side of the male-bonding theme, Fiedler puts us in possession of almost a new method of approaching literature itself. Enormously potent works, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone With the Wind*, known at least in some of their elements to almost everybody on the globe, fall short of literary merits when measured by academic literary standards and by the canons of high art. If this is so, then let us re-examine those standards and canons.

This way Fiedler also talks of a counter-tradition in popular literature. This counter-tradition is dominated by women and domestic values. These two rival myths survive together in popular literature: the myth of the family as Utopia and the family as Dystopia, home as heaven and home as hell, women as redeemer and woman as destroyer. Thus, Fiedler points out that the classroom reading list has examples of books embodying the male tradition, the anti-family myth, whereas our literature is full of books embodying the other tradition as well. Hence, through the analysis of such works, Fiedler attempts to redefine literature in a tradition other than the one set by the elitist critics.



Coming to contemporary times Fiedler asserts that, popular literature also deals with the most dark and perilous aspects of our psyche, otherwise confessed only in nightmares. Such honoured works as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *Medea*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Macbeth* have persisted not merely because they instruct us morally or delight us with their formal felicities, but because they allow us, in waking reverie, to murder our fathers and marry our mothers with Oedipus; to kill a king with the Macbeths; or our own children with Medea; to lie, steal, cheat, deceive and run away from a justified and necessary war with Falstaff and to glory in it.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Fiedler has strong convictions regarding the psychological, moral and social appeal of popular literature. Talking of American culture, he says that the culture of the United States has always been "popular" beneath a "thin overlay of imported European elitism" (17, 64). He further says that "Our national mythos is a pop myth and our revolution, consequently, a pop revolution, as compared, for instance, with either the French or the Russian, which originated in high-level ideological manifestoes and debates. Our War of Independence was rooted in concrete grievances rather than abstract ideas" (17, 64). Moreover, Fiedler says that America has a revolutionary pattern of politics and culture, and that it is a challenge to all nations and cultures. When Europeans or other non-American cultures talk of the incursion in their culture of pop forms like rock, country, and western music, comic books, soap operas and cop shows on television, they tend to refer to it as a "creeping Americanization" (17, 65) of their cultures and is used as a synonym for "vulgarization". It perpetuates a stereotype myth of America as a land of Calibans, half-educated fugitive slaves, the cast-offs of Europe, Asia and Africa. It is a kind of half-truth, says Fiedler. Moreover, it will be repeated again because a considerable number of Americans, primarily the WASP elitist academics, refuse to acknowledge that pop culture, which has spread all over the world today, is essentially American. It is more particularly a part of youth culture to which most Americans like to think of themselves as young (17, 65). Moreover, it is a known fact that American culture is itself a relatively "young culture". It is part of the peculiar American Dream, which has not stopped being dreamt by Americans, even today.

The evolution in Fiedler's writings is recognizable though there are deviations and aberrations, crests and troughs. He does not necessarily cross over all of them. He stops, pauses and seems to say, "This is it—this literature is good literature, read it if you like. but do not thumb your nose at popular literature because it appeals to everyone, it is the literature of the masses.

It may be a paradox, but still true, that Leslie Fiedler is claimed by both the elitist tradition and the pop tradition. On the one hand, some high priests of elitist tradition see him as a member of their clan; on the other hand, the svelte swingers of the pop tradition stoically confirm his affiliation to their group. Yet his criticism amply demonstrates a tilt toward the latter. In his critical writings which span more than four decades now, it will not be wrong or unwise to say that at one time or the other he has reflected practically every colour of the spectrum. However, his major preoccupations, by and large, have not undergone a change. It has been my endeavour throughout to trace, not only his evolutionary trajectory within the framework of his major preoccupations at the micro level but to also highlight the general direction of his criticism at the macro level which shows a determined shift of interest from elite to pop.

Though influenced at an early stage by elitism, Fiedler's iconoclastic temperament could not gulp for long the artificial elitism of high literature. The sixties were a state of transition for him, and then the "populist" man in him began to dominate. He became the people's man rather than the elitists' man. Of course, I have nowhere implied that Fiedler never admired high art, or in future will never admire high art. In fact, he has the same liking for Dante and Henry James as for Margaret Mitchell and Harriet Beecher Stowe. His cry is the cry of a wounded literary soldier, who says don't call pop literature trash, it has great mythic appeal for the populace, it portrays the dream of millions of Americans, it caters to a large segment and many strata of society, it removes all discrepancies of high and low, and such literary books sell over a hundred copies each day.

Fiedler's insights into the archetypal and mythical nature of the American male are penetrating and illuminating. Fiedler admits that it is difficult to really ascertain what drove the American novel back over

the lintels of puberty and adolescence, but he has no misgivings about American sexuality as portrayed in fiction being deficient or regressive. It is for this reason that classic novels turn away from society to nature or nightmare. Hence, the American artist is unable to really imagine the confrontation of man and woman which leads to an escape from sex, marriage and responsibility. Against the backdrop of this theme, Fiedler enlarges his thesis of the myth of the runaway white male who seeks refuge in the company of a coloured male, in a number of books and essays. Fiedler examines the myth of the runaway American male from domesticity into wilderness, in the company of a coloured male, as actually a popular myth of America which works on the same mythical foundation as popular comic books, best-sellers, movies, television serials, etc. Fiedler is constantly telling us that there is another way of looking at elite and popular cultures.

As Fiedler had widely used the word "homosexuality", his thesis was unacceptable to a number of critics. Had he used the word male-bonding, perhaps it would not have aroused so much of adverse criticism. Despite the homosexual overtures present in his first essay, 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!' this analysis has stood the test of time. Winchell points out that Fiedler's thesis is, continually being vindicated by movie and television shows that pair a white hero and a dark-skinned sidekick. Indeed, one early review of the series *Star Trek* was entitled, 'Come Back to the Spaceship Ag'in, Spock Honey!' (20, 6).

Fiedler once said (in 1971) that he is convinced that criticism can no longer and will no longer condescend to popular literature. But since then he has travelled a long way. Turning from the elite he crossed the border to pop in order to better understand books, artifacts and culture. Popular literature, he felt, joined all audiences—children and adults, women and men, the sophisticated and the naive, the initiated and the novice.

What is true about his ethnic identity is even more evident in his professional identity. An academic for most of his life, Fiedler, in his written work has refused assimilation into the WASP community of scholars, an assimilation, he notes in *Waiting for the End*, that has claimed a myriad of his fellow urban Jewish intellectuals. This refusal

implies denying some fundamental values associated with academic methods and the university. But Fiedler is known to make a number of such attacks on university education and academicians. It is a battle in Fiedler's long war against genteel criticism and scholarship to defend the tower of pop art that looms large over all literature now. Fiedler twits at the literary establishment for trying to dictate what people are allowed to enjoy by imposing standards from the elite citadel. This is an extremely witty and spirited defense of the premise that popular culture produces and recognizes excellence and the joys thereof.

He tells academicians (though he is one himself) that though you teach the so-called classics and literature of the elite and highbrow to students in classes of universities and schools, behind the closed doors of your bedrooms you read best-sellers and science fiction, kitchen-maid romances and thrillers. He seems to say, "Put aside these double standards and take a fresh look at the standards already laid down by elite critics. Re-examine and re-evaluate them, and then set a new criterion for judging literature which will embody a liberal mind a broader framework".

When the God of democracy is spreading its reign all over the world, Fiedler says that it will not be the elite who will determine the survival of a book, but the common masses. He challenges us to examine our views about what literature was, is and can be. At the same time, he has resisted the temptation to embrace the point of view which urges that the only art worth preserving and praising is in the popular realm. He has long been aware that just as the American super market can accommodate gourmet delicacies and health foods without losing its homogenous character, so can the American University, without betraying its heritage, include both courses in elite literature and popular literature.

Fiedler has travelled up and down the academic promenade for decades now. He has established that taste is determined by the common man now and not by the earlier so-called ruling class. In the age of democracy, it is the common people who are the rulers and Fiedler's democratic leanings are evident and this is the final evolution in his thought pattern: From highbrow, this critic of elite culture moves to

lowbrow—popular culture of the masses. Fiedler is a man of this age. And it would not be unjust to say that he will be seen as a man for all ages. His evolution is not linear; all through his growth there are ups and downs, reversions and diversions. Whatever the critics might say—that he is a shocker and an iconoclast, provocative and a scandalizer—and in spite of all his protestations too, Fiedler constitutes a one-man fifth column in the elitist citadel to earn the nickname of the Pop Guru.

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**THE ROAD NOT TAKEN:  
A VIEW OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S ORIGINALITY**

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

"Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed."

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

William Blake, one of the first English Romantic poets, is also one of the most original minds in the history of English literature. His "rose" is not the "red rose" of Robert Burns, whose description of love in terms of the objects of nature opened a new and fresh treatment of the subject. Nor is it the "sweet rose" of George Herbert, who emphasizes the permanence of a rose, whose colour metaphysically described by the poet as "angry and brave" "bids the rash gazer wipe his eye". Blake's is the "black" rose doomed to suffer from the "dark secret love" of the "invisible worm" lurking in its bed. Similarly, his pipers and sunflowers, Toms and Lycas, tigers and stars continue to strike us with a sense of poetic as well as prophetic unconventionality. His originality lies in his notoriously unconventional treatment of the traditional political and religious ideas in a variety of creative arts: poetry, prose, prophecies, designs and engravings illustrating his own works and testifying to the peculiar versatility of his genius. The self-illustrated plates of texts of his writings, with their "fourfold visionally aesthetics", as pointed out by Milton Klossowski, directly place him in the Renaissance tradition of picture-poetry or Emblem poetry, which had been based on a "unified mystical world-view", totally displaced by the Newtonian science and the rationalist/dualist philosophy of Locke and Descartes.<sup>1</sup>

Blake's original and radical thinking was responsible for his iconoclastic re-reading of ancient classical culture and literature, his



unorthodox and cabbalistic reinterpretation of the Bible, his revolutionary ideas about class and gender, and his doctrines of the two contrary states of the human mind and its perception through what he called, in *The Marriage*, the “enlarged and numerous senses”. He was against all kinds of externally imposed or created systems, whether political or religious, which he thought were enslaving and abstracting “mental deities from their objects”. The self-explanatory titles of some of his works such as *All Religions Are One*, *There Is No Natural Religion*, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *Showing the Contrary States of the Human Soul*, and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* immediately set the tone of his radical ideas. His emphasis on such key-words as “vision”, “imagination”, “perception”, “infinity”, and “eternity” suggests the quality and nature of his works.

Blake was a visionary who from his early childhood to his old age lived in the world of spiritual or “numinous presences”, and saw, to use his own phrase, through his “corporeal and vegetative eye”, not with it, visions of “such intense cathectic power that they were projected before his eyes as apparitions.”<sup>2</sup> The images he envisioned were not “hallucinations” or “delusions of sense-perception” but his own “self-inspired visions”, whose “actual presence could no more be doubted by [him]...than, say, a dreamer, without waking up, could doubt his own dreams in the course of dreaming them.”<sup>3</sup> In a 1802 verse letter to his friend and patron Thomas Butts, he made his “compound visionary credo” explicit :

Now I a *fourfold* vision see,  
And a *fourfold* vision is given to me;  
'Tis *fourfold* in my supreme delight  
And *threefold* in soft Beulah's night  
And *twofold* Always. May God us keep  
From *Single* vision & Newton's sleep. (My emphases.)

Above all, his creation of a complex private mythology in his prophetic works such as *The Book of Urizen*, *The French Revolution*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, earned him the reputation of being a so-called “mad mystic”, strange and uninterpretable. Recalling his meeting with Blake in 1811 Robert Southey observed, “His madness was too evident, too fearful. It gave his eyes an expression such as you would expect to see in one

who was possessed." The lawyer and literary diarist Henry Crab Robinson, who became closely acquainted with him in his last years, made this entry about his gift of vision: "Shall I call him Artist or Genius—or Mystic or Madman? Probably he is all." Later Robinson made a comment which not only qualified the above one but virtually challenged that of Southey's:

In the sweetness of his countenance & gentility of his manner he added an indescribable grace to his conversation...his observations, apart from his visions and references to the spiritual world, were sensible and acute.

It is no wonder that T. S. Eliot with his classical, royalist, and anglo-catholic bent of mind did not like what Klonsky described as Blake's "revolutionary, millenarian, romantic and libertine" ideas. Despite his criticism of "crankiness" and "eccentricity" of Blake's poetry, Eliot admitted that, for its "naked honesty", it had the "unpleasantness of great poetry". "What his genius required, and what he sadly lacked", Eliot added, "was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attentions upon the problems of the poet."

Understandably, Blake's works were, for the most part, ignored or unknown until Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus* was published in 1863, forty-six years after Blake's death (1817), when the pre-Raphaelite art critics, poets, and painters, with their art-for-art's sake movement, came to appreciate the beauty and quality of his writings printed with colorful illustrations.<sup>4</sup> It is true that Gilchrist's biography recognized the unique Romantic poetic genius in Blake ("a genius unfortunately situated"), an alienated artist cut off from the thought of his time or ahead of his time.<sup>5</sup> But it also contributed to the misconception of Blake's obscurity and mystery when Smetham described the *Book of The 1* and the fragments of *The Marriage* as "mystical...half dream, half allegory...wild and strange...[defying] description or interpretation".<sup>6</sup> Despite their high regard for their subject, the authors of the biography considered Blake's prophetic works to be impenetrably mysterious, a-historical or extra-historical, which in their view challenged history from without. While it tended to neutralize the irreverent heretical elements in Blake, the *Life* also

served to add, to some extent, to whatever opacity may be encountered in his works.<sup>7</sup>

Swinburne was perhaps the earliest critic to discern and defend Blake's sense of bold and energetic humour, for instance, in *The Marriage* (thus anticipating Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom), and who hastened to assert, with reference to Blake's prophetic books, that "in these strangest of all written books there is purpose as well as power, meaning as well as mystery".<sup>8</sup> However, the demystification of Blake began when many influential critics helped explode the Blake myth by explaining the archetypal nature of his mythic symbols in a historical and cultural context.<sup>9</sup> Yeats and Ellis argued for the necessity of symbolism in poetry and explained Blake's symbolic system or his "second language" underlying his "entangled histories", which they thought provided a "profound answer to the riddle of the world". Taking the critical reception of Blake a long step forward, Yeats and Ellis classified his works as the creation of a "serious and coherent thinker—whether mystic, philosopher, theologian, or symbolist."<sup>10</sup> Arthur Symonds with his *Symbolist Movement in Literature* helped to establish the symbolist theory of literature and applied that theory to Blake, although his analysis of Blake's major ideas fitting into that theory was not given much space in his criticism.

With the critics that followed, the Blake criticism noticeably shifted from the study of his mystical symbolism to the study of his revolutionary thought from social, historical, and political point of view. Schorer initiated the discussion of the "politics of vision" in Blake's works, the "angular" practices in social and political criticism. He discussed Blake's denunciation of the conventional philosophies of reason, which were based on sense experience rather than on imaginative vision. According to Northrop Frye, whose *Fearful Symmetry* with its mythopoeic approach transformed the field of Blake criticism, Blake belongs to "the great cosmopolitan humanist culture which arose in Europe between the Renaissance and the Reformation...had...a dislike of the scholastic philosophy in which religion had got itself entangled, and...upheld...imaginative interpretation against argument, the visions of Plato against the logic of Aristotle, the Word of God against the reason of man."<sup>11</sup> Bringing together historical criticism with his own theory of historical archetype, Frye was the first to discover Blake's

apocalyptic vision expressed, for instance, in his satirical treatment of the subject of marriage of heaven and hell. The mode of satire is used not only to denounce the conventional norms and hierarchies of the oppressive power structure established by "system" but to press home his idea of what Frye calls, using the Biblical analogy of wedding for apocalypse, the physical as well as spiritual "union of heat and light", passion and reason, desire and vision—a necessary union to bring about the desired apocalypse through the "enlargement of the senses". Like Schorer before him, Frye also explains Blake's "fourfold" vision of man's expanded soul and therefore expanded perception but finds correlation, for the first time, between them and Blake's vision of resurrection.<sup>12</sup>

While Blake has much in common with other original minds such as Plato, Milton, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Freud, he creates his own system in order to avoid being enslaved by or compared with that of any other. In *Jerusalem* he says, "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's. I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create." The radicalism of his individuality reveals itself when he expresses his dislike of the classical culture and his preference for Hebrew prophecy and the medieval gothic:

The Classics, it is the Classics! and not Goths nor Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars. ("On Homer's Poetry")

Greece and Rome, as Babylon and Egypt, so far from being parents of Arts and Science as they pretend, were destroyers of all Art....(They) swept Art into their maw and destroyed it. A Warlike state never can produce Art... Grecian is Mathematic Form. Gothic is Living Form. ("On Virgil")

The Greek and Roman Classics is the Antichrist. ("On Robert John Thornton")

As Frye points out, to Blake the focus of classical culture was not the individual but the state, not the imaginative or prophetic vision of man but the social and political duties of the citizen.<sup>13</sup> It was a culture based on military ethics, producing a "state religion, which is the source of all cruelty".

By setting up a system of counter-myth, to that of the Bible and the classical antiquity, Blake sets himself against the whole current of Judeo-Christian tradition and attempts to define what he means by

Imagination, "the Divine Vision". Commenting on George Berkeley's *Philosophical Reflections*, he says :

The All in Man : The Divine Image or Imagination. (Plato and Aristotle) considered God as abstracted or distinct from the Imaginative World, but Jesus, as also Abraham and David, considered God as a Man in the Spiritual or Imaginative Vision...Christ addresses himself to the Man, not to his Reason. Plato did not bring Life and Immortality to Light. Jesus only did this.

The whole Bible is filled with Imagination and visions from End to End and not with Moral Virtues; that is the business of Plato and the Greeks and all Warriors. The Moral Virtues are continual Accusers of Sin and Promote Eternal Wars and Dominency over others.

That Jesus came to Remove was the Heathen or Platonic Philosophy, which blinds the Eye of Imagination, The Real Man. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with its "Proverbs of Hell" and "Memorable Fancies", declares that "All deities reside in the human breast" and distinguishes between the "Prolific" and the "Devouring". It is Blake's first major work to turn the traditional Christian notions upside down. The Bible, as understood by Blake, is a story of the "ancient poets", full of original "poetic tales", distorted by the priests for their own advantage.

The counter-myth set in motion in *The Marriage* is even reflected in its unusual form and structure, dialectically "moving between the Blakean contraries of discursive irony and mythical visualization."<sup>14</sup> Unlike Martin Nurmi, who thinks that the poem does have a plan of developing the subject of contraries first, followed by the theme of spiritual perception, which in turn is followed by the modified subject of contraries again, Bloom sees it as having a unity which cannot be charted in its physical structure and "cannot be grasped except by the mind in motion".<sup>15</sup> Like Frye, Bloom also classifies *The Marriage* as a satire, as a "Menippean satire, characterized by its concern with intellectual error, its extraordinary diversity of subject-matter, a mixed verse-and-prose form, and a certain reliance on a symposium setting."<sup>16</sup>

Bloom also describes *The Marriage* as a "surpassingly excellent...literary analysis" in its comments on the *Book of Job* and *Paradise Lost*. In it Blake "seeks to correct Milton's error in vision" when he claims that "the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote



of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it". In Robinson's account of Blake's encounter with the spirit of Milton, Blake claims that Milton asked him to do him a favour: "He said he had committed an error in his *Paradise Lost*, which he wanted me to correct, in a poem or picture; but I declined. I said I had my own duties to perform.... He wished me to expose the falsehood of his doctrine, taught in the *Paradise Lost*, that sexual intercourse arose out of the Fall. Now that cannot be, for no good can spring out of Evil".<sup>17</sup>

*The Marriage's* counter-myth reaches its culmination in the "Lambeth Books", also called Blake's "Bible of Hell", which include *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*. The central idea of these "books" is that the very Creation is the Fall, that the Fall occurs as the infinite divine mind chooses to limit itself in the form of the created, and that the created world is not something made out of nothing but a finite and erroneous perception of the infinite fullness of being, the former being represented by Urizen, the "Eternal Priest", and the latter by Los, the "Eternal Prophet".

Blake's notion of the simultaneity of the creation of the universe and the fall of man is a "diabolical" reading of the "angelic" Bible. To him, this creation means limitation, separation, order, and hierarchy. The prelapsarian condition of being breaks into pieces as the creation takes place. Human perceptions and perspectives narrow as the separations continue. Gradually human beings are so far removed from the primal and primordial unity that they cannot even conceive of the Eternal Vision (described early in the *Urizen*) and their life merely becomes a simple biological function of birth and death. Blake is keenly aware that the Vision itself is complex and irregular, and that it needs structuring at all in the form of the written word is a consequence of the Fall.

Here lies one of the most important paradoxes : the only possible way to redeem and recreate the imaginative vision of the prelapsarian world is through the restraining confines of the language which itself is a product of the lapse and which can never fully express or encompass the idea of that vision. Blake does not hold mankind responsible for their fallen condition; what he holds them responsible for is the propagation of the fallen reason and their inability to reconstitute imaginative vision of the

infinite. And this is what he undertakes to do in his poetical works, which constitute his own "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained".

Blake's understanding of the loss and regaining of paradise has much in common with the Hebrew Cabbala, whose various elements had been adapted before him by Jakob Boehme, Robert Fludd, and Paracelsus, among others. His

fourfold method of envisioning reality seems to reflect...the fourfold hermeneutics devised by both cabbalists as well as scholastic commentators upon the Bible, whereby the literal-historical, the allegorical, the tropological (or moral), and, finally, the anagogical (or spiritual) levels of meaning in Scripture are successively revealed...the various cabbalist and neo-platonist and alchemical mystagogues, from strands of whose doctrines Blake largely spun his own mythopoeic system, held that God's Word (Scripture) was not only prior to his Work (Nature), but had formed it and lay concealed within its outer material husks as essential "ideas" or divine "sparks". Nature, sometimes referred to in this sense as God's "other" Book, was thus conceived as a vast rebus of image-ideas that reflected, and reflected upon, one another in multiple facets of meaning.<sup>18</sup>

Blake's Albion is the symbolic representation of his collective four-fold God-Man, the Adam Kadmon of the cabbalist legend, who, according to the Jewish tradition, "anciently contained in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth".<sup>19</sup> As opposed to the constricting rationalist philosophy, Albion personifies the Divine Imagination and emanates the cabbalist vision of the possibility of innumerable ways by "minute particulars" into the infinite:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.

Seeing "through the eyes" and not "with the eyes", Blake expresses his indignation for the empiricist and neo-classicist traditions of Bacon, Newton, Burke and Locke, whose discourse takes place within the limited range of worldly wisdom and practical expediency, all of which Blake finds reductive. For those philosophers, who think the mind is dominated by the outward sense impressions, the key to knowledge is through the senses, numbers, and chronological sequences. Blake's contention is that



humans cannot comprehend the vision with their senses or any numerical or diachronic application. As he says:

The desires and perceptions of man untaught by anything but organs of sense must be limited to objects of sense. Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. He perceives more than sense (though ever so acute) can discover. ("There is no Natural Religion")

Having failed to persuade her lover Theotormon, obsessed with mental abstraction about the notion of female purity, to take her back, Oothoon, in the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, explores the relationship of man's sensory perception to his conception of reality. Here argument is that beasts and animals have the same senses as man does yet they are not human. So human beings must be more than their senses.

Blake satirizes the chronology of Genesis in his "Lambeth Prophecies". Since the fall is contemporaneous with the creation and, therefore, the world falls as it is created, he attempts to describe a single vision where all experiences are synchronically happening at once. He also mocks the Mosaic Ten Commandments, which he thinks amount to a reduction of experience to ten repressive laws.

I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue and acted from impulse, not from rules. ("The Marriage")

What Blake means by expansion or enlargement of senses necessary to be able to rise above the finite organical perception and to achieve an imaginative transcendence is the faculty of Imagination itself. It is a vital creative faculty that is of crucial and supreme importance not only to Blake but all the great Romantic poets who have attempted to define it in many different ways. But Blake's definition seems to be the most comprehensive and suggestive one. For him, Imagination is synonymous with Poetic Genius, Prophetic Character, and Spiritual Man as opposed to the Philosophic, Experimental and Natural. Elaborating the idea of Imagination in the course of formulating his negative reaction to the classical past, Christian tradition, and empiricist philosophy, Blake brings in the contrast between Nature and Imagination:

All forms are perfect in the poet's Mind, but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature, but are from Imagination. ("On Reynolds")

But to the eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself.... To me this world is all one continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination.... ("Letter to the Reverend John Trusler")

Unlike the other Romantic poets, Blake's understanding of Imagination has hardly anything to do with the external, physical nature, which he views as a kind of feminine enslavement and a shadow of the True and the Real, obstructing the free and full play of the Imaginative Vision. Commenting on Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Blake develops his idea of Imagination further by distinguishing it from the Wordsworthian notions of nature and memory:

One Power alone makes a Poet...Imagination, The Divine Vision. I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually, and then he is no Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration.... Natural Objects always did and now do weaken, deaden and obliterate Imagination in me. Wordsworth must know that what he writes valuable is not to be found in Nature.... Imagination has nothing to do with Memory.

Wordsworth, especially in his early poetry, considers nature to be a living presence, suffused with the pantheistic spirit. For him it is a moralizing force imparting moral and spiritual lessons to man. Blake is very different from Wordsworth when he says in the *Marriage*, "I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation & that to me it is a hindrance & not action; it is as the dirt upon my feet, no part of me...Where man is not, nature is barren." For him, there is no divinity in nature to be followed and emulated by humankind; on the contrary, it is what the human mind makes it to be by implanting intuitions on it. Clearly, Blake humanizes nature whereas Wordsworth naturalizes man. As Frye analyses Blake's comment in the *Marginalia* to Wordsworth's *Recluse*, in Blake's view, "Nature is there for us to transform; it is neither a separate creation of God nor an objective counterpart of ourselves. Blake criticized Wordsworth sharply for ascribing to nature what he should have ascribed to his own mind and for believing in the correspondence of human and natural orders."<sup>20</sup>

Blake is also very different from the Coleridgean concept of "balance or reconciliation of opposite and discordant qualities" when he, again in the *Marriage*, asserts:

Without Contraries is no progression.

Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy,

Love and Hate, are necessary to Human  
Existence.

Opposition is true Friendship.

It is, however, not Coleridge but the traditional religion and the Swedenborgian notion of eliminating evil in the interest of good that are the objects of Blake's direct attack. While he agreed with the eighteenth-century mystical theologian Emanuel Swedenborg's prophecy of millennium, he took issue with his "pious orthodoxy in accepting Good and Evil as static and eternally opposed, rather than dynamic and conjugally united." He thought that any attempt to try to eliminate or reconcile the contrary elements was to seek to destroy existence. As if to respond to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, Blake writes in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two. Note. Jesus Christ did not wish to unite but to separate them, as in the parable of sheep and goats! and he says, "I came not to send Peace but a Sword."

Given the fallen state of man, there should be an unending struggle between the two classes or the two forces—Heaven and Hell, the Prolific and the Devourer, Priest and Prophet, Los and Urizen, and Orc and Urizen. The method Blake adopts to express his revolutionary ideas is one of dialectics: Innocence and Experience, "the two contrary states of human soul". As he makes it clear, these two states do not represent youth and age, one preceding the other, but the two conditions of the human mind and human spirit. *Innocence* is close to or conscious of the prelapsarian joy and freedom, simplicity and openness before the Fall, and *Experience* is the postlapsarian material world of sin, corruption, perversion, doubt, bondage, stifled desires and sterile unions. One is akin to the gentle, spontaneous, and regenerative forces in nature blessed by an omniscient God and the other, to the rules and restrictions imposed by the rulers, tyrants, priests, and patriarchs. One of Blake's editors introduces *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* thus:

The relationship of Innocence and Experience, as contrary states of the soul and as cycles of songs, is not one of direct, static contrast but of shifting tensions. Blake's Innocence, with its central figures of child, lamb, flower, shepherd, and piper, should be

considered the primary state, the norm by which Experience is evaluated, a clear vision of the way life ought to be and indeed can be for many children and for good-hearted adults like the Nurse and the Shepherd.<sup>21</sup>

The *Innocence* songs are full of the images drawn from the pastoral world of birds, daylight, sunshine, morning, summer and spring. Everything in these songs is green, happy, soft, pleasant, and sweet, singing and laughing. They are sung and written down by a piper-poet for whom "the past can only be the primal unity, for the present is innocence and the immediate future is experience".<sup>22</sup> Naturally, his *Innocence* world hangs on the threshold of getting corrupted and polluted. There are hints of change towards sorrow, unhappiness and deception in Blake's ambivalent use of words such as "stain", "weep", "cloud", and "white"; nightfall suggests dangers so that children need to come home before they get lost in the "desert wild" and live in a protected pastoral world represented by the bosom of weeping mother or a "garden mild". At night, when the angels "Unseen...pour blessing,/ And joy without ceasing/On each bud and blossom/ And each sleeping bosom", they also find wolves and tigers howling for prey.

The implied emphasis on the need for safety and being looked after render the *Songs* poignant and account for their veiled ironic elements. The menace that may lurk about makes the nature of comfort almost illusory or elusive. This menace is not just natural but political, social, religious, and racial. *Innocence* poems like "The Chimney Sweeper", "The Little Black Boy" and "Holy Thursday" are deeply ironic, satirical, and pathetic. Although all these three poems are about children in the context of *Innocence* and the speakers of the first two are children, their point of view seems to be from adult perspective. The children in these poems are not just any children but socially suffering, exploited children. Their situation is all the more painful because they happen to be low-class destitutes brought to a passive acceptance of exploitation through religious indoctrination and racial discrepancy. The little chimney-sweep's consolation to his fellow sweeper Tom Dacre for the latter's shaven head,

Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair,

is pregnant with irony and pathos. Tom's dream of freedom and liberation in the after-world, on the condition of his being "a good boy" in this world, and the last line of the poem, "So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm", cannot but be taken ironically because all this means the opposite of what is being said. The notion of being "a good boy" by doing one's "duty" is especially repugnant to Blake, who believes in natural instinct and impulse from within. Tom's dream leads to a moral that is based on an ideology that favours dominant class economic interests and that encourages the use of religion as opiate.

Blake is a Christian who rejects all forms of conventional, institutionalized christianity; he is a radical who denounces all forms of oppression, and who demands total freedom so that he can communicate with God directly, without meditation or submission to moral codes and compulsions. He cannot but have hatred for those "aged men, wise guardians of the poor", who cherish pity for the charity children, and those "Grey headed headles" who, with their "wands as white as snow", lead the march of thousands of charity school children to attend services held in St. Paul's Cathedral on a Thursday during the Easter season. Restraint and obedience in the name of moral precept are evil because they hinder the full flowering of the potential and creative will of "these flowers of London town". Irony permeates such lines of "Holy Thursday" as "Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song/ Or like *harmonious thunderings* the seats of heaven among" (emphases mine).

The phrases emphasized above are highly suggestive of potential rebellious force of the "multitudes of lambs" against their abuse and exploitation, which anticipate Shelley's "West Wind" that would propagate his gospels of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

"The Little Black Boy" is another powerful *Innocence* poem about racial exploitation. It is a strong plea for racial equality, showing how colour consciousness elevates the human consciousness of the exploited and degrades that of the exploiter, who creates a dehumanising false barrier between the races:

And I am black but O! my soul is white.  
White as an angel is the English child,  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light...  
And this I say to little English boy:

When I from black and he from white cloud free  
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy.

Blake's radically democratic humanist position that in God's world all are equal without any discrimination or subjection finds expression thus:

And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noon day.

("The little Black Boy")

He doth give his joy to all.

He becomes an infant small. ("On Another's Sorrow")

And all must love the human form,

In heathen, turk or jew. ("The Divine Image")

Despite possibilities of victimization in the fallen world, the world of *Innocence* retains a quality of spiritual resilience that seems to push aside the occasionally passing shadow of experience and helps to keep the purity of vision or at least the dream of a better world alive.

*Experience* is "blighted Innocence," as Jean Hagstrum calls it.<sup>23</sup> In this state everything is seen and experienced from the perspective of adult consciousness while the subject still remains mostly the same—children—whose free thinking and free expression are thwarted by the establishment. In Blake's own words, it is a world of the "lapsed Soul", "grey despair", "stony dread", "dark disputes", "eternal winter", "frowning frowning night", "forests of the night", "mind-forg'd manacles", "soft deceitful wiles", "false self-deceiving tears", and "free love with bondage bound". This is a "bleak and bare" world where children are suffering from poverty and disease although they live in "a rich and fruitful land", where their hostile and indifferent parents "are gone to praise God and his Priest and King/ Who make up a heaven of (their) misery", and where their tender, growing love is nipped in the bud by their father's deceptively "loving look/ Like the holy book". Not only children but adults also suffer from woe and weakness, alienation and loneliness, in a bloody and ghostly city like London despite the fact that they have been assured of their rights and liberties in well documented form.

Obviously, Blake's critique of the social system includes the organized church (which is "cold" and which provides no room for the



poor), the Urizenic patriarchal fathers and political tyrants. The speakers in *Experience* use a highly figurative language to express their anger and disillusionment at the unnatural horrors of all kinds that sicken the soul. Mercy, pity, peace, and love that constitute "the divine image" and make God and Man one and the same in *Innocence* become the various manifestations of institutionalized Urizenic ("your reason?") virtues in *Experience*. "A Divine Image" shows how, in the name of what passes for human, cruelty, jealousy, terror, and secrecy continue to breed. The "we" of "The Human Abstract" represents those abstracting forces that establish a hierarchical social order under which the exploiting ruling class justifies the existing institutions to perpetuate its rule. It is they who think that "mutual fear" is necessary for the cause of peace and stability. Blake describes their Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as a poisonous dead Tree of Mystery, which he ironically calls "our most holy Mystery", growing in the Human Brain.

Both Blake and Wordsworth celebrate the wonder and delight of the child's world and the adult's coming to terms with the real world. But whereas Blake looks upon childhood as the real centre of life, though the child's world is for him an "unorganized Innocence", Wordsworth takes it to be a state preceding adult wisdom and makes an idealised recollection of it. For one, children are totally different beings, and for the other they are an early remembered phase of adult reality. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth satirizes those who regard the child as "a dwarf man...the noontide shadow of the man complete". For him wisdom by which we are to understand "Solemn thoughts of God and Death" has its own season and must not be forced prematurely upon the state of childhood, which is perverse and reprehensible: "A simple child... what should it know of death?"

It is, of course, Rousseau who for the first time saw the child as rather a special creature and who projected the idea of trying to understand what the world would look like from child's point of view. His belief in the innate goodness and infinite possibilities of man, who becomes corrupted "only by bad laws and customs", his attack on parental tyranny, and his mistrust of books were appealing to Blake who, of course, moved away from Rousseau in certain respects to go along his own way. Both of them attack the system of formal education in



schools which, for children, is an enslavement to books and an obstruction to the workings of Imagination. Rousseau writes,

Reading is a vexation to children, yet it is the only Occupation they are usually employed in. Emilius will hardly know what a book is at twelve years of age: but you will say, he ought surely to learn to read, at least. Yet, he shall learn to read when reading will be of any use to him; till then it is good for nothing but to disgust and fatigue him.<sup>24</sup>

Blake writes "The School-boy" in reaction to book-learning conducted in schools, but he does not believe in Rousseau's alternative of "education through the senses" because he finds that "the idea of a free, unspoilt, 'natural' life of the senses [is not] essentially human and is as much a cultural construct as is any book."<sup>25</sup> Blake is for the life of Imagination, above and beyond the senses.

Blake's idea of "unorganized innocence" reminds one of Yeats's "radical innocence" (in "A Prayer for My Daughter"). Blake's state of innocence usually contains the ironic perception that innocence is ignorance and that the world is otherwise than is perceived through the eyes of innocence. Since "radical" means "root" or "basic", Yeats's phrase has the suggestion of a knowledgeable political and cultural radicalism—a more worldly thing than Blake's—which may be gained or recovered by driving away all hatred and arrogance. Only then his little daughter may have a soul which is "self-delighting/ self-appeasing, self-affrighting/ And that its own sweet will is heaven's will". In other words, it is a question of knowledge and ignorance between the two poets' respective perceptions of the idea of innocence, with Yeats being assertive about the importance of "ceremony and custom", that is, rituals in life and society, and Blake rejecting that as he says, in one of the *Laocoon Aphorisms*, "The outward ceremony is Antichrist".

In spite of his revolutionary thought and tremendous concern for social and political reform, Blake is neither the same as the late eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers nor a precursor of historical materialism, for he is "acutely conscious of the limitations of that [liberal] thinking from the standpoint of a communitarian social ideal", and he does not allow that socio-historical and economic class factors determine consciousness. "But he does have a conception", as Larrissay says, "startlingly original in his time, of how modes of production, modes of consciousness and cultural institutions may be intimately related". For

Blake, the evils of society are too deep-seated to be cured by any particular human ideology that takes into account only the partial truth and not the whole. The tyrant god Urizen, in league with the priests, kings, and worldly fathers, rules the Newtonian mechanistic universe and runs an evil system, so dark and self-enclosed that there is no escape, no matter where humankind belongs to in the spectrum of class and gender.

Of all the evils integrally related with each other and perpetuated by Urizen, "Creator of men" and "mistaken Demon of Heaven", sexual repression seems to be the worst and ultimate perversion. Given his commitment to total freedom necessary for imaginative and transcendent vision, Blake's anger and exasperation against sexual repression is easily understandable. Unlike *Songs of Innocence*, particularly "The Blossom", which shows uninhibited sexuality in various ways, the predominant ingredient of *Songs of Experience* is the suppression of that sexuality. "Earth's Answer" is an outcry against sexual frustration and a poignant plea for sexual freedom:

Can delight  
Chain'd in night  
The virgins of Youth and morning bear?

Does spring hide its joy  
When buds and blossoms grow?  
Does the sower  
Sow by night?  
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

Break this heavy chain,  
That does freeze my bones around  
Selfish! vain!  
Eternal bane!

That free Love with bondage bound.

The maiden Queen in "The Angel" is fearful of giving in to her "heart's delight", confused about her own feelings and unable to participate in sexual love. It is too late when she is ready to encourage any advance:

Soon my Angel came again:  
I was arm'd, he came in vain:  
For the time of youth was fled  
And grey hairs were on my head.

*The Book of Thel*, an extended version of "The Angel", is about a young woman faced with the problems of sexual awakening and sexual initiation. Terrified by the possibility of change and of coming to sexual maturity she resists the condition of absorbed participation in mutual embrace and cannot surrender to the fact of her own being. The examples of personified natural objects, which are the voices of positive acceptance of change which in turn is only a part of larger existence of life do not help. Her singlefold vision of perception prevents her from pondering the reality of her identity and taking the duality of human existence for granted. In spite of her dissatisfaction with her easy life as a shepherdess, the sense of terror of transformation prevails in her. One of the "Proverbs of Hell" in the *Marriage* is, "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence". The "Proverb" may be taken as a reference to the condition Thel imprisons herself in.

Blake's sexual representation takes a revolutionary dimension in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Among other things like slavery, political exploitation and imperial colonization, it is primarily about conventional sexual customs, taking the issue, raised in some earlier poems, to a climatic conclusion and developing it in further details. Oothoon engages, though inadvertently, in sexual act and gets caught up between two men, who are capable of little or no change. Initially, she herself is less than fully adequate because she has her own moments of self-accusation and sadomasochistic attempt to relieve herself of the burden of her unwillful sexual act until the "devil" wins her over. She reflects upon the complexity and, at the same time, the advantage of being human. Finally she breaks out of social and religious prohibitions placed on sexual love and achieves sexual and psychological liberation.

Oothoon's arguments are based on sexual energy versus sexual abstinence, "self-enjoyings of self-denial" versus "Every thing that lives is holy", and the tendency of the fallen humankind to fear change and flux versus joyous acceptance of the process of variation and transformation. Theotormon cannot get over what has happened to Oothoon; Bromion, in his limited perception, becomes ashamed of what he has done to her; only Oothoon, the least inadequate of the three, can overcome ideological limitations, proclaiming,

How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys/ Holy, eternal,  
infinite? and each joy is a Love/ I cry, Love! Love! Love! happy,  
happy Love, free as the mountain wind.

Now Oothoon is for plenty of sexual pleasure, “lovely copulation”, “lustful joy” and “generous love”. Love for her is a benevolent, self-sacrificing emotion that does not seek dominion or destruction. It is an ever-growing blessing that does not have to be paid for or that does not derive its being at the expense of something else. In the course of her emphasizing selfless free love, Oothoon vigorously expresses the inadequacy of marriage—“the frozen marriage bed”, saying:

She who burns with youth and knows no fixed lot is bound/ in spells  
of law to one she loathes: and must she drag the chain/ Of life, in  
weary lust?

Elsewhere called “marriage hearse” (“London”) and “matrimony’s golden cage” (*An Island in the Moon*), Blake writes on yet another occasion:

He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy;  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.

Such a complete reversal of traditional morality pre-empts a simplistic reading of “My Pretty Rose-Tree”. Read ironically, the poem is another illustration of selfish and possessive love as symbolised by the wife of the speaker and by the pebble of the brook in yet another poem.

Blake’s depiction of female aspiration, particularly for sexual desire, is very different from that of his contemporary radical feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is marked by the profoundly disturbing element of her implicit denial of female eroticism as if true female identity depends on the cultivation of female intellectual discourse to the extent of suppressing the emotions of female sexuality, which is for Blake a virtual “non-entity”.

“Energy is eternal Delight” (the *Marriage*); “Active Evil is better than Passive Good”, says Blake in his comments on John Casper Lavator’s *Aphorisms on Man*. Active evil will energize passive good, which in absence of any resistance, lies static and ultimately makes itself conspicuous by its absence. For progression there must be a constant confrontation between the two that will lead to a heightening of perception and an intense awakening of senses. In the *Visions* Blake shows how an act of rape,

a violation of chastity, serves as a catalyst to higher consciousness and a new way of understanding. Oothoon gains her sexual and psychological emancipation only after a series of successive stages in her reaction to the consequences of her overt expression of sexuality.<sup>26</sup>

What is even more important is that sexual union, which is a "three-fold" state plunging humanity into "Generation", holds out the possibility of the "four-fold" state, above "Generation", which is a stage of true creativity and transcendence. Human sexuality, represented by "soft Beulah's night", which is Blake's "erotic realm of the creative unconscious," is as important in him as revolutionary violence for the achievement of absolute liberty without which the ultimate visionary state is not possible. Sexual freedom, that is, the full gratification of the fires of lustful passion is a necessary prelude to the expansion of the sense perception leading to the apocalyptic ascent into "beulah", a higher state of existence in Blake's vision. Similarly, the imaginative freedom is to be secured by removing the restraining influences of both moral good and moral evil, which are not, in Blake's view, mutually exclusive but are actually opposed to human creative energy for, they are founded on terror and cruelty respectively.

Banishing "old nobodaddy" (nobody's daddy?) from his sphere, that is, George III, Urizen and all Urizenic figures (old kings, tyrants, priests) and traditions, Blake declared that "Man is All Imagination", that "God is Man & exists in us & we in him", and that "Man can have no idea of anything greater than Man as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness". In a traditional sense, this is a denial of essential humanity and human limit, so that man ceases to be human by crossing the bar and dissolving or overcoming the difference between God and him. From an orthodox point of view, Blake may seem to be recklessly risking anything to convey his pure visions and radical ideas. What he, however, actually suggests in his excessive anthropocentric zeal is that man is capable of expanding the God-like qualities he is endowed with to the degree of what seems to be infinity to his finite being, provided he has an opportunity to work according to his indomitable and indestructible spirit without any restraint whatsoever. Unlike Proust, who thought that the only paradise was the paradise lost, Blake thought that the loss of paradise meant it could be regained, provided religion, politics, sex, class, and gender were made truly anthropocentric. This forward-

looking vision shall always remain something to be cherished by the imaginative writers in their literary consciousness in the world of practical affairs. In his letter to Thomas Butts in 1803, Blake wrote, "My heart is full of futurity". This "futurity" is never to be materialized in this world of experience.

## NOTES

1. Milton Klonsky, "W. B.: or, The Seer Seen by His Own Vision", *American Review*, Vol. 25, 1976, pp.72.

2. *Ibid.*, pp.70.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Despite some faults, Gilchrist's *Life* (2nd ed. in two volumes, rpt. New York: Phaeton Press, 1969) started the critical discovery of the real Blake. When Gilchrist died in 1861, his wife Anne Gilchrist finished the rest of his work with the help of the Rossettis, Samuel Palmer, James Smetham, and Swinburne, who published his own *William Blake: A Critical Essay* in 1868 as a supplement to Gilchrist's biography.

5. See Deborah Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*, Yale UP, 1969, pp.3-100.

6. Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, Vol. I., pp.78-82.

7. While Mrs. Gilchrist and Smetham were more critical in attempting to defuse the myth of Blake's madness and to describe the inconsistencies of his works as harmless by attributing the mystical and blasphemous nature of his works to the "theory of the mental structure of Blake", Palmer and Swinburne were full of praise, dismissing his madness from their aestheticist standpoint and accommodating his "heresies and eccentricities" in the "light of art and law of imagination", in other words, "poetic genius".

8. A. C. Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868, rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), pp.185-86.

9. After Swinburne's *Critical Essay*, the next major work on Blake is the three volume edition of his works by W. B. Yeats and Edwing J. Ellis, *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (1893). The other groundbreaking studies which mark the changes in the history of Blake criticism are S. Foster Damon's *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924), Jacob Bronowski's *William Blake and the Age of Revolution* (1945), Mark Schorer's *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (1946), Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), David Erdman's *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (1954), Martin Nurmi's *Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study*, Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), John Beer's *Blake's Humanism* (1968).



10. Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.191-92.
11. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton UP, 1947, rpt. Boston : Beacon Press, 1962), pp. 150. According to Frye, "The writers and scholars who form this culture, Erasmus, Rabelais, Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Reuchlin, the More of *Utopia*, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola being the most conspicuous names, seem to have emerged into a kind of visionary Christianity to which the present meanings of neither 'Protestant' nor 'Catholic' wholly apply.... These writers wanted to preserve the central vision of Christianity, and yet most of them envisaged a greater reform of the Church than either Reformation or Counter-Reformation achieved."
12. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, pp.194-97.
13. *Ibid*, pp.148.
14. Harold Bloom, "*Dialectic in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*", *PMLA*, Vol. 73, Sept. 1958, pp.501.
15. *Ibid*.
16. Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, Cornell UP, 1970, pp.71.
17. Klonsky, pp.76.
18. Klonsky, pp.71. For the cabbalist multiplicity of meaning in numerical explanation, see *ibid* (pp.73). Also, see the 16th century Zohar (which means "radiance"), a well-known version of the cabbala, and *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* by Gershom Scholem.
19. For a detailed explanation of the Albion myth in relation to the Cabbal, the Edda, Atlas, and Atlantis, see Frye, *Fearful symmetry*, pp.125.
20. *Ibid*, pp.39.
21. *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, eds. Mary Lynn Johnson & John Grant, Norton, 1979, pp.16.
22. Robert F. Gleckner, "Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs", *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, pp.535.
23. Jean H. Hagstrum, *William Blake: Poet and Painter*, University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp.82.
24. J.J. Rousseau, *Emilius and Sophia; Or, A New System of Education*, tr. W. Kenrick, Vol. II, pp.51.
25. Edward Larrissy, *William Blake*, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985, pp.79.
26. Klonsky (pp.74) brilliantly reads into the shades of meaning of the naming of "Oothoon" and "Urizen":  
 " "Oothoon", with four ecstatic o's, speaks for herself as the personification of sexual joy and freedom in Beulah land. In a similar fashion, reminiscent not only of cabbalist abracadabra but also of primitive name-magic, Blake's malevolent demiurge "Urizen" is contained and revealed in the letter z, the shape of the zigzag thunderbolt with which, as a storm god, he inscribes himself upon the sky".



## TRISTAN CORBIERE AND T.S.ELIOT : THE RETURN OF THE DEAD

In his desperate bid to reconstruct the poetic discourse of his time, T.S.Eliot needed the help of the most macabre of the *poètes maudits*, Tristan Corbière (1845-1875)<sup>1</sup>, who had died of tuberculosis thirteen years before he was born. In 1923, Eliot acknowledged Corbière as one of his masters<sup>2</sup>, a stand he would maintain throughout his life. Yet, if Laforgue has provided some grist for source-hunters, critics<sup>3</sup> have shown no real desire to understand the relationship between Corbière and Eliot, without which the latter would possibly have made a decidedly lesser impact in English and American poetry.

To the readers of French poetry, Corbière is a poet of dissent, of negation, of refusal, in other words an anti-poet, who wished to reject the security and conformism of 'mensonges littéraires' ('literary lies'), of 'la larme écrite' ('the written tear', "Un Jeune qui s'en va", *Les Amours Jaunes*, p. 54) of stereotyped poetic texts. His feelings were never set, literary ones: possibly the reason why he 'fell into Limbo'.<sup>4</sup> One of the strangest poets of late nineteenth century France, his works remind us of a lullaby in one of his own poems :

J'entends le renard, le lièvre

Le lièvre, le loup chanter.

(I hear the fox, the hare

The hare, the wolf sing.)

("Un Jeune qui s'en va". LAJ, p. 53)

Despite sporadic attentions from poets like Apollinaire, Breton and Eliot, and a handful of adventurous French critics like Jean Rousselot, E. Noulet and Michel Dansel, Corbière has all along remained a *marginal* : whose 'unreadable' texts (to use Roland Barthes'<sup>5</sup> terminology) largely evaded, parodied or innovated upon prevailing conventions, and thus persistently shocked, baffled and frustrated standard expectations of readers. Perhaps G.M. Turnell was right when he commented in *The Criterion* in April

1936: '(Corbière's) neglect in his own country was complete. ...He has never been for any writer what Rimbaud was for Claudel or Laforgue for the young Alain-Fournier'.<sup>6</sup> Recent French Criticism, P.O. Walzer regrets in his preface to Michel Dancel's *Langage et Modernité chez Corbière*,<sup>7</sup> has failed to resurrect him. He remains the eternal outsider in French poetry.

It seems that Eliot—submerged as he was in Jules Laforgue at the time—had not 'discovered' Corbière in his Harvard and Paris years. For this, I think, we may safely put the blame on Arthur Symons, who had chosen to ignore him in his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Eliot's first introduction to the Symbolists. And there is no evidence that Eliot's friend and tutor in Paris, Alain-Fournier, had introduced him to the contumacious poet. In his correspondence with Jacques Rivière,<sup>8</sup> Fournier did not mention Corbière even once, though he referred to Laforgue at least 90 times.

It took Eliot almost half a decade to realize that it was Corbière the 'uncataloguable' (Laforgue's description of Corbière in *Mélanges Posthumes*)<sup>9</sup>, who was the real precursor of Laforgue (henceforth, Eliot would always bracket them together), and that he too could serve his special kind of need to launch an offensive on the general floppiness of contemporary English poetry. But before we move on to the details of Eliot's interaction with Corbière's texts, let us try and locate the possible coordinates of their first encounter.

Curiously, although Symons' book had made no reference to Corbière, he was still indirectly responsible for their eventual intersection of paths. Writing about his debt to Symons, Eliot reminisced in 1930 in *The Criterion*: '...but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and *but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière*' (my italics)<sup>10</sup>. So we may legitimately assume from Eliot's statement that it was Paul Verlaine (his 1884 anthology *Les Poètes Maudits* opened with Corbière) who acted as the intermediary. Eliot scholars have failed to notice this important role played by Verlaine.

There could be two other reasons for Eliot's sudden interest in Tristan Corbière. Firstly, the rather unusual homage paid to Corbière by his mentor Laforgue in *Mélanges Posthumes*,<sup>11</sup> which I shall discuss

shortly. Although most English and American commentators of Eliot seem to be curiously oblivious of Laforgue's close links with Corbière, contemporary French critics of Laforgue found him 'trempé, imbu, sursaturé de Corbière' ('steeped, soaked, super-saturated with Corbière').<sup>12</sup> The second reason for Eliot's interest was possibly the publication of Charles le Goffic's definitive edition of Corbière's *Les Amours Jaunes* in 1912, still regarded as the finest ever. Ezra Pound too discovered Corbière in 1913, possibly in the same edition, and called him 'the greatest poet of the period'.<sup>13</sup> As usual, Eliot and Pound shared the excitement of their new discovery, and suddenly began to consider Corbière very important. Pound thought that he had finally found 'another poet to put on the same little rack with Villon and Heine',<sup>14</sup> and in his introduction to a selection of French poetry in *The Little Review* in February 1918, regarded Corbière, Laforgue and Rimbaud as the high water mark of symbolist poetry. He even came to believe that Corbière was 'perhaps the most poignant poet since Villon, in very much Villon's manner'.<sup>15</sup> An early admirer of Laforgue, he began to see the distinctive qualities of Corbière: 'Laforgue conveys his intent by comment, Corbière by ejaculation, as if the words were wrenched and knocked out of him by fatality'.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Eliot, too, would soon regard him as one of the 'most important successors of Baudelaire'.<sup>17</sup> By 11? July 1919, T.S. Eliot, then thirty, was privately admitting in a letter to Mary Hutchinson that Laforgue was 'really inferior to Corbière at his best' (*Letters of T.S.Eliot*, 1988, vol. 1, p. 318). Given Eliot's passionate admiration for Laforgue at that time, it would perhaps be unwise to take the statement lightly.

What Eliot unearthed in Corbière was stunning, especially the uncanny similarity with Laforgue. (Eliot listed the parallels in Clark Lectures VII in 1926, now preserved at the Modern Archives, King's College, Cambridge, TS, p. 170). Like the latter, who died at twenty-seven, Corbière's life, too, was snuffed out at the tender age of less than thirty. Both battled with consumption: Laforgue had pleurisy, and Corbière was handicapped by the deadliest kind of rheumatism and tuberculosis. Ugly, thin, sickly, he was nicknamed 'Ankou' by his neighbours: 'the spectre of death'!<sup>18</sup> Both came to live in Paris for only

a few uncertain years, wrote some of their finest poems on the metropolis and yet lived like complete strangers. Most importantly, both fought against the handicap of their despairing illness by laughing at it, and mocked their fate. Corbière provided T.S.Eliot with what he was frantically looking for in those years: fresh means of shrugging off the trauma of modern experience, *face à la malédiction et à l'éphémère* ('in the face of curse and ephemerality').<sup>19</sup> This defiantly unrhetorical poet would help Eliot further in 'cleaning up the verbal situation'<sup>20</sup> in English poetry (Eliot's own words about Valéry). It would be interesting to note that Stephen Spender, too, found Eliot 'totally unrhetorical'.<sup>21</sup>

It is essential to understand the Laforgue-Corbière relationship for a closer understanding of Eliot's mind. One must admit for the sake of history, that Laforgue was—perhaps with greater artistry, though later on Eliot himself would contradict this by declaring that 'Corbière was a finer poet' (Clark Lectures, VIII, TS, p.170)—rehearsing Corbière's role, possibly with greater intellect, in French poetry. Laforgue's *Mélanges Posthumes* shows that he was actually conscious of this; he was accused of plagiarism as early as in 1885,<sup>22</sup> and suffered throughout his life from guilt complex. Both were dandies because of their desperation to be different, excellent illustrations of the Baudelairean hero ('dandysme à la Baudelaire', in Gourmont's words).<sup>23</sup> In fact, Corbière's self-sketch with hat and walking stick bears an uncanny resemblance with Laforgue's own of a dandy<sup>24</sup> and wonderfully tallies with Conrad Aiken's description of Eliot on his return from France in 1911.<sup>25</sup> This self-sketch (reproduced in Jean Rousselot's *Tristan Corbière*)<sup>26</sup> can easily pass for an illustration of Eliot's Prufrock.

The disconcerting similarity between Laforgue and Corbière—an inevitable *bête-noire* of French literary critics—was possibly first flashed to Eliot by none other than Remy de Gourmont in *Le Livre des Masques* (1896):

Tristan Corbière est, comme Laforgue, *un peu son disciple*, l'un de ces talents inclassables et indéniables qui sont dans l'histoire des littératures, d'étranges et précieuses exceptions,—singulières même dans une galerie de singularités.

(Like Laforgue, *a bit his disciple*, Corbière is one of those indubitable but unclassified talents, a strange and precious singularity,—a singularity even in a gallery of singularities.)<sup>27</sup>

And discreetly by Laforgue too in *Mélanges Posthumes*, which Eliot presumably thumbed very often along with the other works of Laforgue. (*Mélanges Posthumes* was in the third volume of Laforgue's *Oeuvres Complètes*, published by Mercure de France, Paris in 1903, which Eliot bought in 1908). It could not have escaped his notice that Laforgue acknowledged 'un grain de cousinage d'humeur avec l'adorable et l'irréparable fou Corbière' ('a grain of cousinage of mood with the adorable and irreparably crazy Corbière').<sup>28</sup> Much like Verlaine, Laforgue was quick to recognize his originality :

Ce n'est l'originalité de quelqu'un revenu des romantiques et des parnassiens successivement, mais du primesaut à la diable... Ce fut l'art de Corbière. Pas de couchants, pas de poésie de la mer, pas de ciels, pas de spleens pantoumes ... c'est un insaisissable et boucané corsaire hardi à la course.

(This is not the originality of someone breaking free from the Romantics and the Parnassians, in that order, but real devil-care originality ... its art has nothing to do with the poets of sunsets, of the sky, of the sea, of spleen. He is a pirate on the prowl.)<sup>29</sup>

What is it that struck Verlaine, Laforgue and Eliot as so extraordinary in Corbière? Perhaps a clue could be found in the following description of Verlaine's first introduction to *Les Amours Jaunes*, recounted by Charles Morice :

Cette nuit de l'hiver ... that winter night of 1883 during which we read in turn, Trézenik and I, read the precious volume, from the first to the last page, to the master of *Sagesse* ...

Unforgettable hours!... Verlaine laughed continuously and in the most moving, the most poignant passages, his laughter interrupted us : *laughter that held tears.*<sup>30</sup>

In his preface of 25 February 1884 to *Les Poètes Maudits*,<sup>31</sup> Verlaine saw Corbière as pre-eminently a man of scorn.

Son vers vit, rit, pleure très peu, se moque bien, et blague encore mieux.

(His verse is alive, it laughs weeps very little, mocks well and blagues still better.)

It is this strident scorn and laughter of a 'savage poet' and his 'girouette folle' ('crazy somersaults' : self-description in "Le poète contumace", LAJ, p. 69) which isolated him from his contemporaries, and made him a *poète maudit*. It is significant that Verlaine had decided to begin

his anthology with Corbière; he was conscious that Corbière with his 'brutalité charmante' ('charming brutality')<sup>32</sup> might be ushering in a new age. He was right, which is evident from Laforgue's arrival within fifteen years of Corbière's death and the latter's own admission of his kinship with Corbière.<sup>33</sup> And, significantly, despite the general apathy to his works, at least three pioneers of twentieth century poetry recognized him as a forerunner: one is the revolutionary modern poet Tristan Tzara,<sup>34</sup> the other is the surrealist André Breton, who paid tribute to Corbière by including him in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*.<sup>35</sup> The third person to rediscover Corbière, and benefit from his works is T.S.Eliot.

The best way to analyse Eliot's somewhat belated curiosity for Corbière would be to look at the latter through Laforgue's eyes; for Eliot's feeling of kinship and his brotherly admiration for Laforgue were strikingly similar to the latter's own for Corbière. This should be obvious enough (Laforgue was probably more dishonest about this) from the way Laforgue reenacted the same destabilizing modalities, clutching at self-irony and self-ridicule as a possible means of survival in a more and more uncongenial world. Indeed, Eliot arguably imbibed much the same elements from Laforgue as Laforgue himself had done from Corbière a little more than two decades ago.

Laforgue recognized that 'there isn't another verse-artist who has so completely freed himself from poetic language.... The effect is of a whiplash, the drypoint burin; he is frisky, making puns and words with rude romantic abruptness—he *wants to remain outside definition*, not to be catalogued, to be neither loved, nor hated—in short, he wanted to be... beyond every custom on this side or the other side of the Pyrenées'.<sup>36</sup> A man of extraordinarily keen sensibilities, but physically weak like Corbière, Laforgue needed this sense of liberation. He learnt from Corbière's natural gift of parody and talent for caricatures; and one can well imagine that the day after he bought a copy of *Les Amours Jaunes* from Vanier in 1884,<sup>37</sup> Laforgue was in all probability a transformed, rejuvenated man, just like Eliot after his discovery of Laforgue in Harvard.

He (and subsequently, through him his disciple Eliot) learnt from Corbière's 'crazy somersaults' how a 'jeune philosophe en dérive' could



still write poetry by pushing his levity to the furthest point, which has the effect of 'intensifying the seriousness of a poem in an almost unbelievable degree'.<sup>38</sup> As we know, this is exactly what Eliot himself would try to do in the early and the middle period of his career.

Corbière's ruthless humour was a defensive one; his artlessness ('L'Art ne me connaît pas./ Je ne connais pas l'Art' : 'Art does not know me./ I do not know Art') the basis of his art. Of course when he wanted to, this 'artiste sans art, à l'envers' ('artless, overturned artist') could bring off lines as spectacularly refined as any in Mallarmé :

Ces gras graillons grouillants qu'un torrent d'or inonde?

(The seething gobs of fat in golden grease?)

("Paris Diurne", LAJ, p. 243)

As René Matineau argues, the words perfection and imperfection are irrelevant in the case of Corbière.<sup>39</sup> If Corbière the verse-maker is often incorrect and wayward (Laforgue complains : 'pas un vers à détacher poétiquement'—'not a verse to be separated as poetically beautiful'),<sup>40</sup> it is because he *wanted* to be so. In his own words, 'ses vers faux furent ses seuls vrais' ('His false verses were his only truth') ("Epitaphe", LAJ, p. 29). They were his *raison-d'être*, his expiation.

Both Laforgue and his disciple Eliot comfortably fit in this scheme, where the poet—because of his own inadequacies—is no longer an entity. 'Acteur, il ne sut pas son rôle' ('Actor, he didn't know his role'), whose 'naturel était sa pose' ('his natural behaviour was his pose').

At this point, it may be worthwhile to quote from one of Corbière's many poems which can, ironically, help us to know and understand Laforgue and early Eliot.

"Epitaphe"

Il se tua d'ardeur, ou mourut de paresse

S'il vit, c'est par l'oubli; voici ce qu'il se laisse—

Son seul regret fut de n'être pas sa maîtresse

...Coureur d'idéal— sans idée;

Rime riche,—et jamais rimée;

Sans avoir été, — revenu;

Se retrouvant partout perdu.

Poète, en dépit de ses vers;

Artiste sans art, —à l'envers.

Philosophe,— à tort à travers.

Un drôle sérieux, — pas drôle.  
 Acteur, il ne sut pas son rôle:  
 Peintre, il jouait de la musette.  
 Et musicien : de la palette.  
 Une tête! — mais pas de tête:  
 Trop fou pour savoir être bête  
 Prenant pour un trait le mot *très*.  
 — Ses vers faux furent ses seuls vrais.

Oiseau rare — et de pacotille:  
 Très mâle ... et quelquefois très *fille*;  
 Capable de tout, — bon à rien  
 Gâchant bien le mal, mal le bien.  
 Prodigue comme était l'enfant  
 Du Testament, — sans testament.  
 Brave, et souvent, par peur du plat,  
 Mettant ses deux pieds dans le plat.

Coloriste enragé, — mais blême;  
 Incompris ... — surtout de lui-même;  
 Il pleura, chanta juste faux;  
 — Et fut un défaut sans défauts.

Ne fut *quelqu'un* ni quelque chose  
 Son naturel était *sa pose*.  
 Pas poseur, — posant pour l'unique;  
 Trop naïf, étant trop cynique;  
 Ne croyant à rien, croyant tout.  
 — Son goût était dans le dégoût.

Trop cru, — parce qu'il fut trop cuit,  
 Ressemblant à rien moins qu'à lui,  
 Il s'amusa de son ennui,  
 Jusqu'à s'en reveiller la nuit.  
 Flâneur au large, — à la dérive,  
 Epave qui jamais n'arrive ...  
 Trop *soi* pour se pouvoir souffrir,  
 L'esprit à sec et la tête ivre,  
 Fini, mais ne sachant finir  
 Il mourut en s'attendant vivre  
 Et vécut, s'attendant mourir.

Ci-git, —coeur sans cœur, mal planté  
Trop réussi, — comme *rate*.

(He killed himself with zeal, or died of laziness.  
It was thoughtless of him to live; he leaves but this :  
—His only regret was not to have been his own mistress.

...He ran after the ideal, —with no idea;  
A rich rhyme, you wouldn't hear;  
Returning, —without having been there  
Finding himself again lost everywhere.

Poet, in spite of his verse  
Artless artist,—inverse  
Philosopher,—random, perverse.

A funny guy — not droll.  
An actor, he didn't know his role.  
A painter, he played the cornet  
And a musician : with the palette.

A head! — but he had no head;  
Too mad to know how to be dull-witted  
For strokes of styles, used *very's*  
—His false were his only true verses.—  
A rare bird —and a load of rubbish  
Very male ... and sometimes very *whorish*;  
Capable of anything, — good for nothing;  
Bungling bad well and badly good things.

Prodigal like the son in the Testament  
—Ultimately without a will. A gallant temperament,  
And often, from fear of the unstimulating  
Putting his foot in it, unstimulating.  
Dim, but a rabid artist in colour;  
Misunderstood ...— by himself in particular;  
his song was truly false, with tears fraught;  
And he was faultlessly in default.

Was neither *someone*, nor something  
A *pose* was his natural leaning.

No poser, he posed as *unique*  
 Too naive, being too much believing all, but cynic  
 With gusto trusting in nothing,  
 He chose the disgusting.

Too ripe,— because he was too raw  
 Resembling nothing less  
 Than himself, boredom was a delight, and more  
 His ennui amused him all night  
 Even waking him up at night.  
 Derelict, drifter, — in short,  
 A wreck that never reaches port ...

Too much himself to be able to relish,  
 Dried wits and drunken head  
 Done, didn't know how to finish,  
 With an expectation of life he died  
 And lived, expecting to die.

Here lies,— a heartless heart misplaced, a man  
 Too successful — as an *also-ran*.  
 ("Épitaphe", LAJ, pp. 30)

I quoted such a long poem only to show that this is the quintessential Laforgue or Eliot in his formative years. Under the guise of his ruthless attack, by sarcasm, irony and caricature, on what seemed to him the sentimental rhapsodizings of the Romantic poetry, he was indeed expressing his intensely personal reactions in unstereotyped, new, dynamic images and taut, staccato rhythms of unusual vitality.

Eliot observed in the Clark Lectures VIII (TS, p. 169) that Laforgue was 'at once a sentimentalist over the *jeune fille* at the piano with her geraniums, and the behaviourist inspecting her reflexes'. And Corbière was a behaviourist *par excellence*, studying himself with almost complete detachment, and expressing himself in a language of thought-feeling probably unmatched in French literature since Villon. His own piano was, as it were, unaccorded; and the sound emanating was, to quote Huysmans, 'a cry of sharp pain like the breaking of a cello string'.<sup>41</sup> It brought back into French poetry, 'qualities which had been alien to its spirit since François Villon's day'.<sup>42</sup>

Writing about Eliot's poems, E. M. Forster had once remarked that they belong to the succession of Ben Jonson, Marvell and Donne: they are a protest against the personal raptures of the Lake school.<sup>43</sup> No wonder then that Eliot was drawn like a magnet towards the poignant, informal, ironic naïveté of Corbière, to his 'self-mockery scurrilous and savage' (to quote Edmund Wilson),<sup>44</sup> his essentially oral anti-poetry, which helped him to 'break free of the classical corset'<sup>45</sup> and fight his battles with the syntax. Almost as much as Laforgue, Corbière was an exciting discovery for him because of his startling and subversive use of colloquialism and pungent lucidity, which exploded the stale Georgian stockades. 'Cut out the poetry, that's what I've been trying to do all my life', Eliot had confessed to T.S. Matthews.<sup>46</sup> One good reason for Eliot's interest in Corbière was obviously the latter's apoeitic preference for the spoken word incorporated into the rhythm of verse, which diminishes the distance between *parole parlée* (spoken speech) and *parole écrite* (written speech). This was done by Corbière with vehemence. Eliot's own preoccupation with common speech is well-known. Long under the compelling influence of Laforgue, Eliot suddenly discovered the strident, shrill texts of Corbière: 'Picaro and vagabond, brusque, succinct, forcing his verse along with a whip... without an aesthetic, with nothing at all of poetry or versification, scarcely anything literary about them...'<sup>47</sup> He was, in Verlaine's words, 'le dédaigneux par excellence' ('the disdainer par excellence')<sup>48</sup> of all prevalent codes: in poetry and in life.

Apart from this fundamental stylistic aspect of the Corbière-Eliot relationship, there could be another equally important one. I presume that Eliot's 'aboulie and emotional derangement'<sup>49</sup> had set in by that time. He was already thrown into the orbit of a woman of uncertain nerves. What was probably little more than a literary exercise — possibly too clever and coquettish at times—now became a horrifying reality. And all of a sudden, Corbière became very important, for Eliot discovered in him the kind of serious irony he was unable to find among the seventeenth century poets. 'The metaphysical poets', he reiterated in the course of his discussion on Corbière, 'were witty, but not ironic—not ironic in so serious a way as this. *Real irony is an expression of*

suffering, and the greatest ironist was the one who suffered the most—Swift'. (Clark Lectures, VIII, TS, p. 172). Interestingly, Corbière's friend Pol Kalig, too, called him 'un tendre comprimé ('a repressed soft heart').<sup>50</sup>

I would like to draw attention to the reference to a jaundiced love apparent in the title of Corbière's book : *Les Amours Jaunes* ('Yellow loves'). Tristan Tzara, who emphasised this point in his famous preface, suggested that the Breton poet used 'aimer jaune' like the French idiom 'rire jaune', probably proclaiming himself a cuckold.<sup>51</sup> Eliot himself, in a complete mess soon after his marriage, probably looked forward to Corbière's irony to transmute his nightmare. The Laforguian mask, which sometimes betrayed his anguish, did not always come to his aid ; the hard-cruised Corbière seemed more useful at certain periods. His language of relentless aggression expressed a self-destructive and yet peculiarly liberating introspection that suited Eliot, because for him the courage to struggle along 'constitutes life for a poet to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal' (SE, p. 137).

In the spring of 1871, Corbière had made the acquaintance of Count Rodolphe de Battine and his mistress, an Italian actress Armida-Josephine Cuchiani, with whom Corbière fell in love. She is the 'Marcelle' of his poetry. In 1872, he chased Armida and Count Battine to Paris and settled in Montmartre for the last four years of his life. Though Marcelle did not entirely deprive him, Tristan remained the eternally frustrated lover, 'être faussé et mal aimé' ('falsified and ill-loved') :

Allons! La vie est une fille  
 Qui m'a pris à son plaisir.  
 (Here goes! Life is a whore who's taken me  
 For her sensuality.)  
 ("Paria", *ibid.*, p.129)

Eternel féminin de l'éternel Jocrisse!...  
 Fais claquer sur nos dos le fouet de ton caprice.  
 (Eternal Feminine to the eternal Noddy! ...  
 Crack on our backs the whip of your caprice.)  
 ("Féminin singulier", *ibid.*, p. 34)

or



Lui cracher à la bouche  
 Cet *amour*! Il l'a mérité.  
 (To spit in the mouth  
 This *love*!— He deserved it.)  
 ("Femme". *ibid.*, p. 60)

Eliot may have been surprised to notice the resemblance between his life and that of Corbière, 'un roman pauvre entr'ouvert' (*ibid.*, p. 59): a bad novel — half opened.

Amour mort, tombé de la boutonnière.  
 —A moi, plaie ouverte et fleur printanière.  
 Camélia vivant, de sang panaché!  
 (Dead love, fallen from my lapel.  
 —For me, the vernal flower, and a round as well!  
 Living Camelia, — with blood variegated!)  
 ("Duel aux camélias". *ibid.*, p. 61)

La mort dans tes bras me berce  
 (Death in your arms cradles me.)  
 ("Un jeune qui s'en va". *ibid.*, p. 55)

To Corbière, a woman is 'lascive, féroce, sainte et bête' ('lascivious, ferocious, holy and stupid', "A l'Eternel Madame", *ibid.*, p. 33) Eliot's day to day relationship with Vivienne, we now know, evoked the same picture of a jaundiced love.

But primarily important for Eliot was Corbière's sensibility, which he thought was exactly like what he had learnt from his study of Elizabethan drama, the poetry of Donne, Gourmont's critical theories and Dante. Tristan Corbière as much as Jules Laforgue, seemed absolutely the right specimen for research in his own laboratory; there was the same kind of 'cooperation between acute sensation and acute thought' (Clark Lectures, VIII, TS, p. 74). So fascinated was he with Corbière that he could say: 'Corbière at his best can find an image, a parallel, which in its way, is as fine as Dante or Shakespeare' (*Ibid.*, VIII, TS, p. 171). Eliot's theory of 'sensuous appreciation of thought' and 'thinking in images' may have had their origin in Gourmont's analysis of the organic relation between an idea, an image and a sensation'.<sup>52</sup> But no less important is his debt to the synthesis of the subjective and the objective in Baudelaire, Laforgue and Corbière, their intensely personal nature of impersonality, and their physiological poetics.

To the young enthusiast in quest of a new horizon in language, Corbière seemed to corroborate Gourmont's views that 'Le style est un produit physiologique et l'un des plus constants, quoique dans la dépendance des diverses fonctions vitales' (The style is a physiological product and one of the most constant despite the dependence on various vital functions')<sup>53</sup> and 'la sensibilité comprend la raison elle-même, qui n'est que la sensibilité cristallisée' ('Sensibility includes reason itself which is nothing but crystalized sensibility')<sup>54</sup> Whether the 'thought-feeling' of Corbière was close to the 'metaphysical' (or the Dantean) metaphysics is immaterial; the fact remains that Eliot thought it was.

Reading the poetry of Corbière a century after his death, one cannot help wondering at the injustice done to him by Eliot critics. The *dédoublement* and irony of the dissenting, artless artist and the topsyturvy philosopher, who 'died hoping to be alive/ And lived hoping to die' were echoed in Eliot's poetry for a longer period of time than one would imagine. If Laforgue had given him 'nourishment' in his youth and 'directed (his) first steps' (TCC, p. 126), Corbière helped him to stop and ponder over those first steps. His admission to E.J.H. Greene that he took up Corbière seriously again between 1915 and 1920 is crucial. It was exactly the period when, in the words of Grover Smith, 'Eliot, having lost his original facility, was obliged to learn his art again'.<sup>55</sup> Eliot was, obviously enough, still under the Laforguan spell and was desperately trying to branch out: the possible cross with Corbière at this particular point of time has, therefore, a special interest for any reader of Eliot's poetry. Eliot had brought out his first two volumes of poetry during this period, and a third was on the anvil.

We have noticed the basic similarity of the predicament of alienation in Corbière and Eliot. Bonamy Dobrée called Eliot a 'contumacious' poet, 'who finds himself ill at ease in life, unable to accept current valuations, urged to mock, to flout, to outrage, he is hurt by life—he will harden, but cannot rot into cynicism'.<sup>56</sup> Dobrée does not go far to discover the roots of this contumaciousness. For example, the monotony of life in "Prufrock" or "Rhapsody"—rightly attributed to Laforgue—is also the core of Corbière's poetry:

Repasser à la ritournelle  
 Se dépasser et trépasser!  
 (To surpass oneself and kick the bucket!)  
 ("Paris", LAJ, p. 23)

This no less Laforguian than Laforgue's poems, although probably Corbière was harder on himself than Eliot's mentor. And there is the same sense of being a non-entity, who is hurt by life :

Je suis là ...mais comme une rature.  
 (I am there, but like a thing rubbed out.)  
 ("Le poète contumace". *ibid.*, p. 67)

This was enough, one would imagine, to set Eliot on the prowl. His 'an aimless smile that hovers on the air' could be a transposition of Corbière's 'L'inerte sourire/ Qu'il porte là comme un faux pli' ('The inert smile he displays like a false crease', "Femme", p. 60) or even

Et moi, le tire, en me rongeant,  
 Un sourire idiot—d'un air intelligent.  
 (And I, while in torment,  
 Put on an imbecile smile— with an air of discernment.)  
 ("Rhapsodie du sourd". *ibid.*, p. 100)

Writing about Eliot's 'dull tom-tom', Stephen Spender says, 'The tom-tom, incidentally, is an early example of the savage and the jungle which Eliot hears ever more insistently under the mask of the so-called civilization'.<sup>57</sup> It would perhaps be relevant here to add that Eliot was—with great assurance—quietly pilfering from Corbière's *Rhapsodie du sourd* :

Va donc, balancier soûl affolé dans ma tête!  
 Bats en branle *ce bon tam-tam* ...  
 (Go then, pendulum, distracted in my head, boozed!  
 Beat with a swing this fine tom-tom...)  
 (*Ibid.*, LAJ, P. 101)

The 'paper rose' ('Her hand twists a paper rose') could be a straight translation of 'fleur en papier' ("Paris", *ibid.*, p. 26). The famous streetlamp in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" may have been suggested by 'la lampe d'habitude jetait par instants sur nous un éclair tremblotant, tout le reste me semblait de l'autre monde' ("L'Américaine") ('Off and on, the binnacle lamp threw a trembling beam over us, everything else seemed of the other world'). Eliot's Baudelairian revulsion and fasci-

nation for women —expressed in ‘female smells’ or ‘hearty female stench’ in “Rhapsody” may have their origin in ‘ce poison, *l’odeur de femme*, m’emplissait les narines’ (‘This poison, *female smells*, filled up my nostrils’). We remember the great disgust with which Eliot refers to the ‘rank, feline smell’ of Grishkin (“Whispers of Immortality”, CPP, p. 53).

The Sweeney poems have an outward resemblance with those of Théophile Gautier, whom Eliot and Pound would consciously try to emulate towards the end of the second decade of the century; but in effect the savage, ferocious cartoons are possibly the fruit of Corbière’s influence. The use of irony in the quatrains of “A Cooking Egg” and “Whispers of Immortality” is hauntingly close to Corbière’s quatrains—and as usual no critic has taken notice of that.

Lord Byron, gentleman-vampire  
Hystérique du ténébreux  
Anglais sec, cassé par son rire,  
Son noble rire de lépreux

—Hugo : l’Homme apocalyptique  
L’Homme-ccci-tuera-cela.  
Meurt, garde national épique  
Il n’en reste qu’un — celui-la.  
(Lord Byron, gentleman-ghoul  
Hysteric of the somber;  
A Briton, dry and shaken  
By his noble leprous laughter.

—Hugo : apocalypse man,  
The Man of this-will-end-that  
Dies, an epic national guard  
There is only one Hugo—he’s that.)  
 (“Un Jeune qui s’en va”, LAJ, p. 54)

The stringent irony in this description—strangely Eliotic, in retrospect—suits the poet himself more than Byron or Hugo. Besides, ‘son noble rire de lépreux’ (‘his noble laugh of a leper’) is possibly the origin of the Laforguian (and Eliotic) shrug. Though René Taupin and Edward Greene (*T.S.Eliot et la France*, Paris, 1951, pp. 97-98) have taken great pains to demonstrate the external similarity of “The Hippopotamus” with Gautier’s poem of the same title, one feels that Eliot’s poem is *in essence*

closer to that of Corbière. I shall quote a quatrain from Eliot to demonstrate how the banality of an idea is conveyed by the rhyme or the use of an exalted name which deflates the balloon of romanticism. This is possibly best illustrated in :

I shall not want Honour in Heaven  
For I shall meet Sir Philip Sydney  
And have talk with Coriolanus  
And other heroes of that kidney.

I shall not want Capital in heaven  
For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond  
We two shall lie together, lapt  
In a five per cent Exchequer Bond.

("A Cooking Egg", CPP, p. 44)

The big drops from the serious to the mundane are part of the little mischiefs of Corbière :

On frappe... oh! C'est quelqu'un  
Hélas! Oui, c'est un rat.

(There is a knock... oh! It must be somebody  
But alas! Yes, it's a rat.)

("Le poète contumace", LAJ, p. 69)

which, in retrospect, appear distinctly Eliotic!

René Taupin, who was probably the first to study the French influence on Eliot, has mentioned the 'realism of extraordinary density' to be found in a poem like "Dans le Restaurant" that the latter had supposedly absorbed from 'Baudelaire, Pound and Corbière'. He referred to "Mr. Apollinax" and "Gerontion", where every object is the presentation of a real object, 'dépouillé de toute buée, et de toute poussière d'émotion et de sentimentalisme' ('stripped of all mist, of all dust of emotion and sentimentality').<sup>58</sup> Modern Poetry, Taupin observed, does not have a poet with a rockier voice, nor a verse which is more scathing. He found echoes of Corbière's "Frère et soeur jumeaux" and "Un riche en Bretagne" in "Rhapsody" and "Gerontion".

Even though in *The Waste Land*, Eliot's vision was Dantesque and Baudelairean, and structurally the poem owes something to Valéry Larbaud, Corbière's savage audacity—which in great moments of disarticulation would inspire him to rhyme a word with a vowel—bursts

upon the surface through the veil of the grail legend, like the rat which crept through the vegetation :

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag  
It is so elegant  
So intelligent. (*The Waste Land*, CPP, p. 130)

Surely, this enhances the feeling of chaos in Eliot's poem, reminding us of Corbière's :

Ay Panneau O O O O  
Tu n'as pas besoin d'ombrelle  
Tu peux tenir ton chapeau.  
(Ay signpost O O O O  
You don't need a parasol  
You gonna keep the hat.)  
("Les pannoides", LAJ, p. 226)

or

Aie, aie, aie, aie, aie  
Aie, ... qu'il est laid.  
(Aie, aie, aie, aie, aie  
Aie, ... how ugly he is.)  
("Sous une photographie de Corbière", *ibid.*, p. 215)

Corbière's experience had modified Eliot's sensibility, and he now used— with greater assurance— his deadly tools, his crazy somersaults, to subvert the structural expectations of the readers.

Like Laforgue and Eliot, Corbière too frequently used quotes from other writers in the epigraph and burlesqued them with compelling effect in his poetry. He often made oblique references to Romeo, *Paul et Virginie* and Robinson Crusoe ("Le Poète Contumace"), which as we know, was also part of Eliot's own method. Both used scraps of popular songs and overturned others' lines (for example, he deliberately misquoted Macbeth, "Litanie du sommeil", *ibid.*, p. 103) with a confident, carefree abandon.

The cross with Corbière's sensibility and method is again reflected in certain passages of *The Hollow Men*, where Eliot uses a fairly straightforward style, very different from the cinematographic juxtaposition of *The Waste Land*. A reader of Corbière may be uncannily surprised at the verbal parallels (Eliot reminded us that in Corbière, the emphasis is on the *word* and the *phrase*, Clark Lectures



VIII, TS, p. 170), and notice how an observation is transformed into a state of mind. Is it the kind of 'concentrated conceit' that Eliot compared with those of Dante in the Clark Lectures ? (Ibid., TS, p.171)

Ma pensée est un souffle aride  
(my thought is a dry whisper)

Ma parole est l'écho vide  
Qui ne dit rien— et c'est tout  
(My speech is an empty echo  
Which is meaningless — and that's all.)  
("Paria". LAJ, p. 128)

Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless.  
(*The Hollow Men*, CPP, p. 83)

Le vide chante dans ma tête  
(Emptiness sings in my head)  
("Un Jeune qui s'en va", LAJ, p. 52)

Le marteau bat ma tête en bois  
(The hammer beats my wooden head)  
("Cris d'aveugle". ibid., p. 148)

Headpiece filled with straw  
(*The Hollow Men*, CPP, p. 83)

Corbière was unique among the French symbolists to use italics extensively : very often parts of sentences and even whole sections (for example, 24 stanzas of "La Rapsode Foraine", which Eliot regarded as his 'greatest poem', Clark Lectures VIII, TS, p. 171) were written in italics. What is highly interesting for us is that Eliot's own use of the italics in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* has a striking resemblance with Corbière's. In "La Rapsode foraine", which is about the assemblage of crippled and diseased at a religious festival in Brittany, Corbière calls the long section in italics 'Le cantique spirituel' ('the spiritual chant', LAJ, p. 139), and this is exactly what it is too in *The Hollow Men*. The blind man's song in Corbière's "Cris d'aveugle" has very strong claims to be the precursor-text of Eliot's poem; it has the

same tone and mood, and evokes the same pattern of feeling :

*Deus misericors*

Le marteau bat ma tête en bois

Le marteau qui fera la croix

*Deus misericors*

*Deuse misericors*

*(Deus misericors*

*Deus misericors*

The hammer beats my wooden head

The hammer that will drive iron into the cross

*Deus misericors*

*Deus misericors.)*

("Cris d'aveugle", LAJ, p. 148)

The repetitive prayer of the man of stone with remorseless eyes :

Pardon de prier fort

Seigneur, si c'est le destin

...

Pardon de crier fort

Seigneur, contre le sort

(Sorry for praying loudly

O Lord, if it is the destiny

...

Sorry for praying loudly

O Lord, against the destiny)

(Ibid., p. 148)

anticipates Eliot's

For Thine is

Life is

For Thine is the

*This is the way the world ends*

*This is the way the world ends*

*This is the way the world ends*

*Not with a bang with a whisper.*

*(The Hollow Men, CPP, p. 86)*

and even sections of *Ash Wednesday* :

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn

(CPP, p. 89)

The key image of the blind eye -- *The Waste Land*, is after all, what the blind Tiresius *sees* —is used as a metaphor and a projector. Speaking on this aspect of Tiresius, Stephen Spender comments : “We need an eye which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present. This is the creative eye”. (*Eliot*, 1975, p.102) The first draft of *The Waste Land* was to start with :

First we had a couple of feelers down at Tom's place  
There was old Tom, boiled to the eyes, blind

We remember :

I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead. (*The Waste Land*, CPP, p. 62)

Then there is that reference to the sexually inadequate Mr. Eugenides, the one-eyed merchant, who melts into the phoenician sailor. The eye reappears in *The Hollow Men* :

Slightless, unless  
The eyes reappear  
...Eyes I dare not meet in dreams  
In death's dream kingdom  
These do not appear

or

The eyes are not here  
There are no eyes here  
In this valley of dying stars. (CPP, pp. 84-85)

and *Ash-Wednesday* VI :

And the blind eye creates  
The empty forms between the irony gates  
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.  
(CPP, p. 98)

It would be interesting to imagine that these are perhaps some of Eliot's creative borrowings, which he enamelled in his own poetry with the accuracy of a surgeon, giving them far-reaching poetical depth and width. A look at the following may corroborate this :

L'oeil tué n'est pas mort ...  
L'oeil cloué n'est pas mort  
(The slain eye is not dead  
The nailed eye is not dead)  
("Cris d'aveugle". IAJ, p. 148)

Et lui, dans son plafond  
 Ne peut plus voir les araignées ...  
 Il laisse errer là son oeil mort  
 (And he, in his ceiling,  
 Can't see any longer the spiders ...  
 He lets wander there his dead eye.  
 ("La pipe au poète". *ibid.*, p.57)

Voir est un aveuglement  
 (To see is blindness)  
 ("Décourageux", *ibid.*, p. 197)

The eye-image gives a particular poignance to the quest of Eliot. It was already there in "Burbank with a Baedeker": 'A lustreless protrusive eye/ Stares from the protozoic smile'. It is like a deep wound at the heart of modern civilization. What was disjointed in Corbière seems to acquire a philosophic dimension in Eliot.

Here I would like to draw special attention to the French poems of Eliot. When he was in France in 1910-11, he, by his own admission, had flirted with the idea of setting down and scraping along in Paris and 'gradually write French'.<sup>49</sup> He did write in French during a barren period after "Prufrock" in order to lift his block. 'I did these things as a sort of *tour de force* to see what I could do. That went on for some months. The best of them have been printed. I must say that Ezra Pound went through them, and Edmond Dulac, a Frenchman we knew in London, helped with them a bit'.<sup>50</sup> Four of these were published in *Poems 1920*.

E.J.H. Greene believes that Eliot's French poems are literary exercises in the manner of Corbière: he may have got the hint from Eliot's title "Mélange Adultère de Tout", which was indeed the opening line of Corbière's "Épitaphe pour Tristan-Joachim-Edouard Corbière. Philosophe, Epave-mort". While the French poems do have similarities with Corbière's, few have noted that Eliot's poetry from the beginning was *always* a 'mélange adultère de tout' ('adulterous medley of everything'), which was also the basis and the *point de départ* of Eliot's modernism, and possibly of the Corbière-Laforgue diversion from Symbolism.

Tristan Corbière seems to have helped Eliot in getting rid of the bald patch after 1916. Although Eliot's French poems are rather stilted

and artificial, and hardly qualify as good poetry in French, there are unblended elements of almost all his recent readings, of Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Gide and especially Corbière. "Le Directeur" (1917) resembles Corbière's "Épithaphe" to the extent that it may be called an abridged version of Corbière's famous ironic self-portrait, where he publicly undresses: his acute self-mockery is an expression of acute pain. Eliot's "Mélange Adultère" too turns back ironically on himself, like Corbière's "coureur d'idéal— sans idée" ('One who runs after an ideal, without a clue about it'), who stumbles on his centotaph in Mozambique.

Another short 17-line version of Corbière's *Épithaphe*, to be found in the second Vanier edition of *Les Amours Jaunes* (LAJ, p.282n), which Eliot may have read, and more alike in size and texture, could well be the real parent-text. Moreover, Eliot's 'En Amérique, professeur/ En Angleterre, journaliste' (CPP, p. 47) seems to be a poor carbon-copy of Corbière's "Un riche en Bretagne": 'C'est le bon riche, c'est un vieux pauvre en Bretagne/... c'est un philosophe-errant dans la campagne' ('He is a good rich, an old poor in Brittany/ ... a wandering philosopher in the countryside', LAJ, p. 134.).

"Le Directeur" too shows a Corbièrian mannerism of staccato rhymes ('Le Directeur/ Conservateur/ Du Spectateur' etc, CPP, p.46), but is too slight a poem, if it is to be called a poem at all, and lacks the bite of Corbière. On the other hand, Eliot's "Dans le Restaurant" has brilliant examples of merciless pun à la Corbière:

Bavard, baveux, à la croupe arrondie  
Je te prie, au moins, ne bave pas dans la soupe.  
(CPP, p. 51)

The poem seems to have strong resonances of Corbière's "Le Bossu Bitor", especially of the conversation with the waiter. The jerky snatches of conversation in the poem are much like those of Eliot's *garçon délabré*, and Bitor's lecherousness and misery anticipate those of the waiter. The final passage of drowning in Corbière's poem is transmogrified in Eliot's poem: in the former, the drowned, hunch-backed sailor had once known love; in the latter, the dissipated waiter was once handsome. The structural analogy is revealing. As for Eliot's "Lune de Miel", the wretched honeymoon with hundreds of bedbugs ('centaines de punaises', CPP, p. 48) and the strong smell of a bitch ('une forte odeur de chienne',

ibid.) bring back memories of Corbièrian bitterness in a travel-poem like "Veder Napoli poi Mori", where a customs officer is compared with "verminous kings" (LAJ, p. 116).

Tristan Corbière had learnt to hate Romanticism from Baudelaire and his father Edouard Corbière. He lived among simple men, and yet was endowed with a complex modern sensibility. His deformity and physical suffering isolated him from those he desired to be with: in frustration and anger, he wished to be a prostitute's dog who could lick up unpaid love ('Je voudrais être alors chien de fille publique/ Léchér un peu d'amour qui ne soit pas payé', "Sous un portrait de Corbière", Ibid., p.237). At bottom, he thirsted for the sea, which for him stood for natural vigour and health. Eliot would not have failed to notice Remy de Gourmont's reference to his father's 'violent amour pour les choses de mer' ('violent love for things of the sea')<sup>61</sup> which had influenced a man of his talent and acute nervous tension: the sea was possibly a kind of sexual release. 'La mer n'est plus qu'une fille à soldats' ('The sea is no more than a soldier's whore). The sea, not altogether unsoiled by man, can till absorb his ugliness. It becomes a symbol, which, as G. M. Turnell argues, 'is an antidote to the disintegration of man'.<sup>62</sup> While Eliot mourns the 'lost sea-voices' and 'lost sea-smell', he does bring back memories of the broken cello-strings of the imaginary seafarer in the shabby quarters of nineteenth century Montmartre.

Although Eliot may have initially learnt to exploit the water-image from Laforgue, I suggest that Corbière's hunger for the sea ('Le sort est dans l'eau': 'The destiny is in the water', "Le Naufrageur", LAJ, p. 190) added a new dimension to it. The image of drowning in the last lines of "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and that of death in water in *The Waste Land* and "Dans le Restaurant" were probably seized upon and welded into his poetry from such suggestive lines as Corbière's 'nous étions mangés par la mer' ('we were being eaten up by the sea') ("L'Américaine", LAJ, p. 266). In Eliot's case, the vitality of water gradually became associated with his spiritual pursuit.

I do not agree with G. M. Turnell (*The Criterion*, April 1936) who a little impetuously concludes that Corbière's poetry was 'an affirmation of life' (p. 397), that 'it was a plea for the integrity of man' (p. 401).



The kind of man that he was, a rank outsider in society, a true *poète maudit*, Corbière could not care less about 'affirmation' and 'integrity' (Laforgue, for that matter, believed that he lacked it). Yet his was a deeply subversive influence and his tools proved to be lethal in the hands of T.S. Eliot in disrupting the genteel Georgian discourse of the time. Thanks to Eliot, Corbière, the 'wry, agitated joker,' (Gustav Kahn's epithet)<sup>63</sup> unwittingly became the inspiration behind a crucial turning-point in the history of English poetry.

One of Corbière's major contributions to twentieth century poetry was his journey towards the unwritten sentence: 'vers une phrase désécrite' (title of a chapter in Christian Angelet's *La poétique de Tristan Corbière*),<sup>64</sup> his laboriously unskilled qualities (Remy de Gourmont's words in *Le Livre des Masques*),<sup>65</sup> his strong passion for automatism, his contemptuous disregard for punctuation, his phonetic writing. No wonder that foremost surrealists like Tristan Tzara and André Breton have acknowledged their debt to him.<sup>66</sup> Philippe Soupault encouraged McIntyre<sup>67</sup> to translate Corbière— one of his 'most authentic ancestors'.<sup>68</sup> To quote Michel Dansel :

En effet, sa langue revêt à nos yeux, presque cent ans après la mort du poète, une modernité à toute épreuve. Car le langage poétique de son temps couvait une mutation qui devait aboutir, après diverses révolutions, à la désarticulation d'une technique traditionnelle, à la désarticulation d'une technique traditionnelle, à un éclatement du verbe. La poésie de Tristan Corbière fit donc l'office de contre-poison posthume.

(In fact, his language takes on, almost a hundred years after his death, a modernity which has stood all tests. Because in the poetic language of his time, a mutation was brewing which had to end, after diverse revolutions, in the disarticulation of traditional technique, in the explosion of the verb. The poetry of Tristan Corbière serves, therefore, as a posthumous counter-poison.)<sup>69</sup>

His typographic style influenced Apollinaire's cryptograms, the surrealists and many minor scribblers (like Birot, Marinetti and Raymond Roussel), learnt from him, as did Céline, Prévert and Raymond Queneau. The absence of all punctuation in the burlesque epigraph of "Épithaphe" and "Cris d'Aveugle" suggests Corbière's exasperation with technical devices. His non-conformist poetic style showed that one could say

almost anything: 'volonté de communicabilité totale' ('desire of total communication').<sup>70</sup> There was a constant refusal to use the old counters. Tristan Tzara asserts that this 'volonté d'expression' (desire of expression) which reaches a point of exasperation, is far from being disorderly; on the contrary, it is a 'dérroulement cohérent de la pensée poétique' ('coherent unfurling of the poetic thought').<sup>71</sup> A reader of *The Waste Land* would not fail to notice Eliot's love of the cryptogrammatic, possibly a heritage of Laforgue and Corbière. At the same time, there could perhaps be no second opinion about Eliot's desperate search for the coherence of poetic thought that Tzara speaks of. In Eliot, the disparate elements always tend to coagulate to form a coherent whole.

Ironically, this 'isolated eccentric'<sup>72</sup> from France, who taught Eliot the language of disarticulation (which remained the central characteristic of Eliot's poetry till well into the twenties) also helped him with one of his most harmonious constructions ever: "In my beginning is my end". There is every reason to believe that this is a transposition of the elaborate play on 'fin' (end) and 'commencement' (beginning) in Corbière's epigraph to his poem "Épitaphe":

Sauf les amoureux commençants ou finis qui peuvent commencer par la fin il y a tant de choses qui finissent par le commencement que le commencement commence à finir par être la fin en sera que les amoureux et autres finiront par commencer à recommencer par ce commencement qui aura fini par n'être que la fin retournée ce qui commencera par être égal à l'éternité qui n'a ni fin ni commencement et finira par être aussi finalement égal à la rotation de la terre où l'on aura fini par ne distinguer plus ou commence la fin d'où finit le commencement ce qui est toute fin de tout commencement égal à tout commencement de toute fin ce qui est le commencement final de l'infini défini par l'indéfini —Egale une épitaphe égale une préface et réciproquement.

(Except for lovers beginning or finished who want to begin with the end there are so many things that end with the beginning that the beginning begins to end by being the end the end of which will be that lovers and others will end by beginning to begin again with this beginning which will have ended by being only the end reverted which will begin by being equal to eternity which has neither end nor beginning and will end by being also finally equal to the rotation of the earth when you'll have ended by no more distinguishing when

the end begins from when the beginning ends which is every end of every beginning equal to every final beginning of the infinite defined by the infinite— 'This equals an epitaph which equals a preface and conversely.)' ("Sagesse des Nations", 'Epitaphe', LAJ, p. 28)

In fact, Pierre Leyris' French translation of "East Coker" (first and last lines) and "Little Gidding", v, shows the analogy more clearly; for Leyris uses the same words (*fin* and *commencement*) as Corbière.<sup>73</sup>

Eliot would state in the Clerk Lectures VIII: 'In the work of Corbière, there is less evidence of philosophic reading', ...he has less direct feeling of 'the absolute' (than Laforgue). Yet Corbière's desperate fatalism reflected in these words form a major philosophic premise of Eliot in *Four Quartets*. This of course shows how Eliot's anxiety of influence operated at varying and indeterminable levels of awareness. (If, as J. J. Sweeney suggests,<sup>74</sup> Eliot heard of Mary Stuart's motto 'En ma fin est mon commencement' from Maurice Baring's book published 1931, and even John Maschfield's play *End and Beginning* (1933), his encounter with Corbière still remains vital.) Who else but Eliot, always aware of the plural character of a text, could transmogrify it by introducing a philosophic backbone in such a way? Reading the memorial tablet with the two phrases 'In my beginning is my end' and 'In my end is my beginning' at the Church of St. Michael's in East Coker, Eliot's ancestral village, how many would know that the lines may belong to Tristan Corbière?

Most of Eliot's models (Dante, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Larbaud), it would seem, moved from scepticism to belief. Was Corbière a believer? He *was*, thought Verlaine, but in Satan.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Corbière's biographer A. Sonnenfeld believed that his *Les Amours Jaunes* was a 'document *spirituel* de premier ordre ('*spiritual* document of the first order').<sup>76</sup> Corbière, he believed, admitted the transcendent, without losing the perspective of the world and his own life. Religiosity in Corbière, according to Burch,<sup>77</sup> is best expressed in *Armor* ("Saint-Tupetu de Tu-Pe-Tu", "La Rapsode foraine", "Cris d'aveugle"). We have already noticed the thematic and linguistic analogy between "Cris d'aveugle" ("The Blind Man's cry") and *The Hollow Men*: there is the same cry of despair, the same broken utterance of a prayer. As for Corbière's "La Rapsode foraine", Eliot singled it out in the Clark Lectures VIII as his 'greatest poem' (TS, p. 171). There are elements of spiritual love

in poems like 'Litanie' and "Chapelet". Burch argues that Corbière was not a new Job; his poetry was an expression of protest against his own suffering. Although 'sans guère de pratique catholique' ('without any Catholic practice')<sup>78</sup>, since his childhood Corbière was called upon to reflect on one of the central questions of Christianity : the problem of physical suffering and human misery. Sonnenfield's contentions may be merely an interpretation, for Corbière never made any direct reference to Christianity, nor did he receive the last Sacrament.<sup>79</sup> Yet this could help us in the long run in explaining the far-reaching impact of Corbière on Eliot's mind. Like Dante, Baudelaire and Laforgue, he too seems to have signalled to Eliot an end and a beginning : the end of a life of wordly anguish and the beginning of that of a redeemed sinner.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

I acknowledge my gratitude to Modern Archives, King's College, Cambridge, for granting me permission to see the unpublished Clark Lectures (1926) of T.S. Eliot.

Tristan Corbière's *Les Amours Jaunes* is included in a list of Eliot's books made by his first wife Vivienne in her diary, now in the New Bodleian Library at Oxford.

*Les Amours Jaunes* (1873; Paris : Gallimard, 1973, 1988 ed.) has been cited in the present essay as LAJ. T. S. Eliot's *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London : Faber and Faber, 1969, 1990 ed.), *Selected Essays* (London : Faber and Faber, 1932, 1952 ed.) and *To Criticize the Critic* (London : Faber and Faber, 1965, 1978 ed.) as CPP, SE and TCC respectively.

1. *Edouard Joachim Corbière* (1845-1875), known as *Tristan Corbière*, published only one book of poems, *Les Amours Jaunes* (1873). It evoked no response in France till Paul Verlaine included him in his anthology *Les Poètes Maudits* (1884) alongside Mallarmé and Rimbaud. Jules Laforgue, who was accused of plagiarising Corbière, highlighted his distinctive qualities in an article later included in *Mélanges Posthumes* (1903).

2. "Lettre d'Angleterre", *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, November 1923, p. 619.

3. There are rare exceptions like Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (1931; London, Fontana, 1967 ed.) pp., 81-82. Critics like Herbert Howarth and Leonard Unger do not even mention the name of Corbière.

4. C. F. MacIntyre, introduction, *Selections from 'Les Amours jaunes'* by Tristan Corbière (Berkeley : U of California Press, 1954) p. 10.
5. According to Barthes, it is a text 'that imposes a state of loss, that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language'. (*Le Plaisir du texte*, Paris : Ed. du Seuil, 1973, pp. 25-26).
6. G. M. Turnell, "Introduction to the Study of Corbière", *The Criterion*, April 1936, p. 396.
7. Michel Dansel, *Langage et Modernité chez Corbière* (Paris : Lib Nizet, 1974) p. 15.
8. Index of proper names, Alain-Fournier et Jacques Rivière, *Correspondance* 2 vols. (Paris : Gallimard, 1991).
9. Jules Laforgue, *Mélanges Posthumes* (1903; Geneva : Slatkine Rpts., 1979 ed.) p. 125.
10. T.S. Eliot's review of *Baudelaire and the Symbolists* (1929) by Peter Quennell in *The Criterion*, January 1930, p. 357.
11. Laforgue, pp. 119-28.
12. L.G. Mostrailles (Pseudonym of Léo Trézenik) in *Lutèce*, August 1885, quoted in Jean-Louis Debaube, *Laforgue en son temps : Langues et documents* (Neuchâtel : A la Baconnière, 1972) p. 199.
13. Ezra Pound, "French poets", *The Little Review*, February 1918, quoted in Val Warner, *The Centenary Corbière* (Cheshire, Chesire : Carcanet New press, 1975) p. li.
14. Ezra Pound, "The Approach to Paris", quoted in Cyrena Pondrom, *The Road from Paris* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1974) p. 192.)
15. Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays* (London : Faber and Faber, 1954) p. 282.
16. Pound, *Investigations*, quoted in René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* (London : Jonathon Cape, 1985-86) vol. 5, p. 165.
17. Same as 10, p. 358.
18. Jean-Louis Lalanne, notes, *Les Amours Jaunes* (1873; Paris : Gallimard, 1988) p. 278.
19. Dansel, p. 130.
20. Eliot's own words about Paul Valéry, introduction, Valéry, *The Art of Poetry* (New York : Bollingen Foundation, 1958) p. xxi.
21. Stephen Spender, *Eliot* (Glasgow : Fontana, 1975, 1986 ed.) p. 10.
22. Debaube, pp. 251-2. Gustav Kahn revealed in *Symbolistes et Décadents*, Paris, 1902, p. 28 that he had indeed introduced Laforgue to Corbière's poetry in 1880. An exasperated Laforgue wrote to Léo Trézenik : 'Tout le monde

me jette Corbière à la tête' (Everybody throws Corbière on my head'). See François Ruchon, *Jules Laforgue, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Geneva : Albert Ciana, 1924) p. 73)

23. Remy de Gourmont, *Le Livre des Masques* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1896) p. 154.

24. The sketch on the cover of *Poésies Complètes* by Jules Laforgue (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1970).

25. Richard Marsh and Tambimuttu, eds., *T.S.Eliot : A Symposium* (London : Frank & Cass, 1965) p. 20.

26. Jean Rousselot, *Tristan Corbière* (Paris : Ed. Seghers, 1951) p. 64.

27. Gourmont, p. 155.

28. Michael Collie, *Jules Laforgue* (London : the University Press, 1977) p. 42.

29. Laforgue, pp. 126-7.

30. Charles Morice, *Tristan Corbière* (Paris : Messin, 1912) p. 22, quoted in Warner, p. xi.

31. Paul Verlaine, ed., *Les Poètes Maudits* (1884; Cognac : Le temps qu'il fait, 1990) p. 20

32. Ibid., p. 24.

33. Same as 28.

34. Rousselot, p. 69.

35. André Breton, ed., *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris : Ed. du Sagittaire, 1950) pp. 163-8.

36. Laforgue, pp. 121, 126.

37. Collie, p. 43.

38. Same as 6, p. 396.

39. René Martineau, *Tristan Corbière* (Paris : Le Divan, 1925) p. 50.

40. Laforgue, p. 123.

41. Wilson, p. 81.

42. Ibid.

43. E. M. Forster, in Leonard Unger, ed., *T.S. Eliot : A Selected Critique* (New York : Rinehart & Co, 1948) p. 15.

44. Wilson, ibid.

45. Michel Dansel's words about Corbière, Dansel, p. 60.

46. T.S. Matthews, *Great Tom : Notes Towards the Definition of T. S. Eliot* (London : Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1973, 1974 ed.) p. 159.

47. Laforgue, pp. 119-120

48. Verlaine, same as 31, p. 19.



49. Eliot to Richard Aldington, 26 October 1921, quoted in the introduction, *The Waste Land : A Facsimile and Transcript* by T. S. Eliot (London : Faber and Faber, 1971) p. xxii.
50. Personal communication by René Martineau, quoted in Micha Grin, *Tristan Corbière, poète maudit* (Paris : Evian, 1972) p. 55.
51. Tzara, preface, *Les Amours Jaunes* (Paris : Club Français du Livre, 1950) quoted in Rousselot, p. 61.
52. Remy de Gourmont, *La Culture des idées* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1990) p. 66.
53. Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1902) p.19.
54. Ibid., p. 107.
55. Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays : A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago : U of Chicago Press, 1956, 1961 ed.) p. 39.
56. Bonamy Dobrée, *The Lamp and the Lute* (New York : Barnes and Noble, 1964) p. 101.
57. Spender, p. 44.
58. René Taupin, *L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine* (1929; Geneva : Slatkine Rpts., 1975) p. 235.
59. Interview given by T. S. Eliot in *Paris Review* (Spring/ Summer 1959), partly reprinted in *T. S. Eliot, 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', 'Ash Wednesday' and Other Shorter Poems* ed. B.C. Southam (London : Macmillan, 1978, 1993 ed.) p. 50.
60. Ibid.
61. Gourmont, *Le Livre des Masques*, p. 158.
62. Same as 6. p. 403.
63. Kahn's comment on Corbière during the Laforgue-Corbière controversy in *Lutèce*, August 1885, quoted in David Arkell, *Looking for Laforgue : An Informal Biography* (Manchester : Carcanet, 1979) p. 168.
64. Christian Angelet, *La Poétique de Tristan Corbière* (Bruxelles : Palais des académies, 1961) p. 103.
65. p. 155.
66. See Rousselot, pp. 69, 84-85.
67. MacIntyre, preface, p. vii.
68. Rousselot, p. 82.
69. Dancel, p. 137.
70. Rousselot p. 79.
71. Ibid., p. 85.

72. Albert Sonnenfield, *L'oeuvre poétique de Tristan Corbière* (Paris : PUF, 1960) p. 121.

73. T. S. Eliot, *Poésie*, Trans. Pierre Leyris (Paris : Ed. du seuil, 1947, 1969 ed.) pp. 185, 225.

74. Grover Smith, "Tourneur and Little Gidding", *Modern Language Notes*, June 1950, pp. 420-21.

75. Same as 31. p. 11.

76. "Tristan Corbière, poète chrétien?" *Les Cahiers de l'Iroise*, January-March 1960, pp. 1-9.

77. Francis Burch, *Tristan Corbière* (Paris : Lib. Nizet, 1970) p. 123.

78. Verlaine's words, same as 31, p. 11.

79. Val Warner, p. xxiii.

## **SHAKESPEARE IN INDIAN LANGUAGES**

It is extremely difficult to try to present a picture of a uniform reception of Shakespeare in India. Here deep and pervasive, there scanty and sparing – it is as complex and problematic as the story of Western impact on Indian literature itself. We do not know the precise number of translations of Shakespearean texts in different Indian languages. On the evidence of available catalogues and accounts of Western impact on Indian literatures, the number appears to be substantially large. These translations, which also include adaptations of various kinds, coincided with the growth of a new narrative and dramatic literatures in different Indian languages. Some of them were inspired by the growth of a *new* theatre distinct from the performing traditions of pre-colonial India. The potentiality of Shakespeare translations was defined by the nature of Indian understanding and perception of Shakespeare as a dramatist, a poet, a narrator, and a story-teller. These translations, therefore, should be considered as part of experimentations of new literary genres that were emerging in various Indian languages in the nineteenth century. In other words, Indian encounter with Shakespeare is an essential part of the history of Indian literary transformation in the last century.

The familiar framework of translation-studies involving linguistic and cultural issues with reference to two texts, one in the source language and other in the target language, is inadequate to grapple with the complexities of this history, as it fails to take care of three features, one, the uninterrupted continuity of a process covering a period of more than a century, two, the simultaneity of translations and the growth of drama in different languages of India, and three, the political and cultural authority that monitored the whole activity of translation. This is something unprecedented anywhere in the world. Translation of literary works have always been undertaken by individuals with a motivation to present foreign texts to their literary communities: Shakespeare was translated into French or Moliere into English by competent bilinguals,

the reputation of Shakespeare in France or Moliere in England respectively rested almost entirely on those translation, and not on the opinion of a handful of scholars who could read them in the original. In India, on the contrary, Shakespeare translation began when English education was more or less firmly established and a sizeable population of English-knowing people had emerged, and Shakespeare had become a cultural icon for the elite. This English-educated class was quite critical of its own literary heritage : it tried to present a new set of canons and models replacing the traditional one. It also tried to present a defence of 'imitation' on basis of evidences culled from the histories of literary contacts between Greek and Latin, Latin and the younger vernaculars of Europe, to legitimize its own passionate attraction for Western models. The translation of Shakespeare was undertaken by this class at a time when its tribe was on the increase. This is slightly baffling because the English educated Indians did not require any translation of Shakespeare. They were the zealous guardians watching keenly all attempts to "translate" Shakespeare not only into Indian languages but in any other artistic code. One such instance of the anxiousness for the preservation of the "purity" of Shakespeare may be found in the Bengali novel *Rajani* (1877) written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, one of the great admirers of the bard.

...he (Amarnath) began to turn over *The Shakespeare Gallery* on my table... His thesis was that it was an audacious conceit that tried to depict in a picture what was expressed in language and through action; such attempts could never be successful, nor were these pictures successful. He opened the picture of Desdemona and observed, 'You get her patience, sweetness and modesty, but where is her courage with the patience, and her pride of constancy with the modesty?' He pointed to the illustration of Juliet and said: 'You have here the figure of a beauty in the first flush of youth, but you miss youth's impressive restlessness.'<sup>1</sup>

The number of English-knowing people was probably very high at this time when this novel was written, and was limited to a few cities, but it was large enough to influence the reading-public. Translations were made for that section of the reading-public, which did not have any English or very little English. In other words the readership was divided into two groups and the relation between the two was highly hegemonic.

It is ironical that the influential section of the English-educated community that was keen to see Shakespeare to remain in his pristine purity and not to be contaminated by translations, undertook the responsibility of translations. This ambivalence on their part conditioned the whole exercise of Shakespeare transmission in India.

Partly because of this ambivalence, the translated works were never treated with respect. The critics did not analyse them with care nor talked about their possible impact on Indian literatures except marginally. At best they were treated as an useful aid towards the introduction of the bard to the Indian public, the goal being the reading of Shakespeare in the original language. This is quite natural in a country where English was the medium of instruction in the centres of higher learning, and the language of political and cultural authority. To read a translation of an English text in Hindi or Telugu is admission of one's inferior status. Even today an English translation of a French or German work is considered more respectable than its translation in an Indian language. One must understand this cultural context to appreciate the complexities of Shakespeare-translations in Indian languages. The most influential section of the Indian literary community, unlike say the Japanese, did not require translations of Shakespeare : they enjoyed Shakespeare in the original, both in the classroom which was the major channel of propagation of Shakespearean texts, and on the stage, howsoever limited its sphere of influence.

What then were the motivations of translating Shakespeare into Indian language? The primary motivations, as I have already suggested, was to present to the Indian readers, not proficient in English, the specimens of English literature which had been already accepted by the English educated Indians as models of highest literary excellence. These translations were as much an exercise to introduce foreign literary models to the general Indian readers as to bridge the increasing gap within the Indian literary community. The translators of Shakespeare into French or German did not feel obliged to present him as the greatest figure in literary history, nor were they participants in a massive acculturation programme initiated and controlled by a foreign government. The Indian translations of Shakespeare, as indeed the translations of various other English works, were designed to supplement the exercises initiated by

the creative writers in Indian languages themselves. These translations present two facets of modernization of Indian literatures, which was more or less identical with Westernization: literary and social.

Michael Madhusudan Datta, one of the first modern playwrights of India, took Shakespeare as his model and his friends invariably applied canons of Shakespearean plays in judging the newly emerging dramatic literature. He defended the "foreign air" about his first play *Sharmistha* (1858) and wrote significantly in a letter to one of his friends, "I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking; and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration for everything Sanskrit." In this letter Datta also mentioned, "I have been showing the second Act (i.e. of *Sharmistha*) already complete, to several persons totally ignorant of English...." This is a strong evidence indicating the anxiousness of the Indian writers to make their works understood and acceptable to the larger section of the reading community and to "educate" them.

Venogopala Charryar, who translated *The Merchant of Venice* in Tamil under the title *Venice Viapari* in 1874 declared that one of his aims was "to help the Hindu Pandit in seeing a great difference between the Verisimilitude of the English drama as represented by Shakespeare and the unreality of the Hindu drama as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

The other facet of this exercise is social, intimately connected with the questions of caste and gender, conventions and authority, freedom and restraint, tradition and change. In the preface to *Vikara-Vilasit* (1883), the Marathi translation of *Hamlet*, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar 1856-1895), one of the most renowned social reformer and a close associate of Lokamanya Tilak, writes that one of the objectives of reading plays of different cultures is to realise the limitations of one's own society. Those who advocate child-marriage, or the tonsuring of the heads of the young widows, or are engaged in debates on the appropriate size of one's turban or codes of dress during meals, or whether the husband should address the wife by her name and feel proud of such things need not read *Othello* or *Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet*."<sup>3</sup>

It would be extravagant to claim that Shakespeare translations were undertaken with the prime motivation of social reform but there is hardly



any doubt that the new social morality that emerged in nineteenth century India through various religious and social reforms aiming at changes in the caste-hierarchy and gender relations derived sustenance from Shakespeare. M. V. Malkani, the distinguished Sindhi scholar, mentions that *Romeo and Juliet* adapted as *Gulzar am Gulnar* (1900)— a tragedy transformed into a happy-ending play under popular pressure — was reprimanded by the elders of the D. J. Sindhi College, Dramatic Society for the overboldness of its love scenes. In a society where marriage is strictly utilitarian and arranged by the guardians, where pre-marital love is almost an impossibility, *Romeo and Juliet* could be seen as a serious threat to social norms. The distinguished Bengali poet Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay in his translation of *Romeo and Juliet* omits the line “I will kiss thy lips” (V. iii, 164) but retains the next lines

Haply some poison yet doth hang on them  
To make me die with a restorative (V. iii, 165-6)

An expression like “I will kiss thy lips” was not unusual in non-dramatic literatures, but it was extremely offensive in plays intended to be staged. To translate or not to translate such ‘foreign’ texts, therefore, was not an innocent literary question. It was a political act in deeper sense, a choice between defending the social codes and challenging them.

## II

The primary motivation of the translators, then, was enrichment of the emerging Indian literatures in general and the Indian stage in particular. Tagore admitted that “Shakespeare plays are always our dramatic model. Their manifold varieties and extensiveness and conflicts had captured our mind from the beginning.”<sup>4</sup> Indian writers were searching for new models both in Sanskrit and in English, and one may even say that the sudden rise of translation from Sanskrit was partly because of the presence of Shakespeare in India. One should remember that there was hardly any translation from Sanskrit plays into modern Indian languages in the pre-British period, translation of Sanskrit plays in the nineteenth century coincided with the translations of Shakespeare. Girish Chandra Ghosh, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Bharatendu Harish Chandra, Gopal

Ganesh Agarkar, Govind Ballal Deval, Mahadeva Shastri Kalhatkar, P. Sambhandha, Mirza Qalich Beg and Aga Hashr, to mention the most distinguished playwrights of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, representing different languages, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Sindhi, and Urdu, were all translators of Shakespeare, and some of them translated Sanskrit plays as well. These writers-translators were successful in creating a space for a foreign dramatist in the Indian literary scene, but Shakespeare continued to exist in Indian cultural life as two distinctly different and hierarchical figures, the Shakespeare in the English language and the Shakespeare in its Indian incarnations. The first Shakespeare existed exclusively in the class room and in the study of the English educated Indian. The other Shakespeare, who naturally had a wider area of operation, was both welcome and resisted, admired and subverted. The sudden growth of translations from the Sanskrit in the nineteenth century is partly a manifestation of the resistance to Shakespeare. The enterprise of the Parsi theatre, on the other hand, which used Shakespeare as the most useful commodity of entertainment, was a successful appropriation, almost 'cannibalization'<sup>5</sup> of the British playwright.

The story of the appropriation of Shakespeare which includes translations and adaptations of various kinds, presents a stratified structure each representing a different Shakespeare created and sustained by different culture-groups, often working at cross purposes. The Parsi theatre, for example, which made Shakespeare an immensely successful commercial proposition was criticised strongly by the dramatists in different parts of the country.

The first phase of the history of Shakespeare translations in India—the time span of this phase varies from language to language—is marked by the feature that can be called indigenization or Indianization. While the creative writers were anxious to appropriate European literary models, the translators shared their anxiety to Indianize Shakespeare in order to graft the plots and the situations and also the world view of the Shakespearean plays into the main body of Indian literatures. The translations and the creative writings represented two forces of Indianization and Westernization that shaped the new Indian literature in general and the Indian theatre in particular.

Hardly any one of the early translations of Shakespeare can be called translation in the usual sense of term. This was not due to the incompetence of the translators as generally believed, but they were designed to be so. Leaving aside the large number of translations of Lamb's *Tales From Shakespeare*, done mostly out of pedagogical necessity, or to fulfil the demands of a growing fiction reading public—which incidentally contributed immensely to the popularization of Shakespearean plots and characters — all other works claiming to Shakespeare's were adaptation of some kind or other, sharing a common anxiety for their Indianization. Haran Chandra Rakshit (1864-1926) had "translated" Shakespeare into Bengali prose in twelve volumes (1896-1903). He wrote: *mahakavir sei apurva natakavalir marmanuvad ami upanyasakare grathita kariyachi* ("I have summarized the wonderful plays of that great poet in the form of a novel"). *Hindi Shakespeare* in six volumes (1912-14) by Gangaprasad contains summarized stories of all the thirty-seven plays.<sup>6</sup> The common objective of most of the pioneers in Tamil— V. Viswanatha Pillai, Venugopala Charyar, S. Narayanaswamy Iyer were among them— "was to give the main plot of the play in a readable third person narrative. Even the few, who translated some of the plays of Shakespeare in the same form, did not care to include the literary characteristics of Shakespearean drama such as puns, equivocation, irony and allusions."<sup>7</sup>

The first Bengali translation of Shakespeare, *Bhanumati Cittavilas* (1853),<sup>8</sup> a translation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Hara Chandra Ghose (1817-84) is yet another example of the exercise towards Indianization.<sup>9</sup> Not only did he Indianize the names of the dramatic personae but also changed the story by adding new materials. In the English preface to this translation, Ghosh wrote that he had written a "Bengali *natuck* or drama taking only the plot and underplots of *The Merchant of Venice* with considerable additions and alterations to suit the native taste..."<sup>10</sup>

The first Shakespearean play to be staged in India in an Indian language is *The Taming of the Shrew*. It was staged in Surat in November 1852: the text was in Gujarati entitled *Nathari Firangiz Thekani Avi* (A Bad Firangi Woman Brought to Sense).<sup>11</sup> The text is no longer extant but the title indicates it was probably an Indian version

of the English play for the Parsi theatre. The translator, it appears, found it difficult to translate the word *shrew* and to contextualise it to an Indian situation, particularly to present an Indian Kate convincingly within the Indian social milieu. Kate goes against the Indian woman stereotype, almost revolutionary in her refusal to marry—this is something inconceivable in Indian society, marriage being the ultimate *dharma* of a woman. But at the same time she presents a type of woman that the male audience delights in watching being tamed. The use of the title *Nathari Firangiz* is a clever device to appropriate the story that satisfies the Indian male chauvinism without demeaning the Indian womanhood, but underlining the Indian criticism of the European female. It was important for the translator to remind his reader that Kate was not an Indian but a Firangi.

The translators of this play in other Indian languages too faced similar predicament in Indianizing it and that is evident from their various strategies of translating the title itself. The titles of Kannada translation—*Chandi mardan Natakam* (1910 by K. Lakshmana Rao) and *Tratika Nataka* (1920 by H.H. Gadigeyya)—and of the Bengali translation, *Chamundar Shiksha* (1915 by Nagendra Nath Ray Chaudhuri) indicate how desperately Indian translators had been looking for the equivalents of *the shrew*. '*Chandi mardan*' would literally mean 'grinding/crushing a violent woman'. *Tratika* is also associated with a female fiend. Both *Chandi* and *Chamunda* are violent forms of the goddess Durga, both also refer to ferocious and aggressive women. Modern Indian translators have used less harsh words for "the shrew". K. Vargese Mapila translates it in Malayalam as *Kalahini Damanaka* (1958) meaning 'dominating the quarrelsome'. Rangeya Raghava avoids the term 'shrew' altogether by entitling his Hindi translation with an innocent '*Parivartana*' (1958) meaning 'Transformation'. The Tamil translation *Candaikkari Cathavakkapattadu* (The Vixen Transformed Into a Lady, 1913) by T. S. D. Samy is more explicit about the nature of the transformation.

Indianization of Shakespeare followed three different strategies. The first was to recast the dramatic form into the narrative and to assign it to a new and pseudo-Sanskritic sub-genre. Vidyasagar's translation of *The Comedy of Errors* (1869) with the title *Bhranti-Vilas*, is a fine example. He took every care in changing the title of the play, names

of persons and places, eliminated all traces of foreignness, substituted all references to Western customs and social behaviour by appropriate cultural equivalents. 'The capon burns; the pig falls from the spit' (I, ii, 44), for example, has been eliminated, it being offensive to both Hindu and Muslim sensibility. 'Meat is cold' has been replaced by a non-descript vegetarian menu, *ahar samagri* (food), as a literal translation could have given wrong signals. In the Tamil version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, "the scenes of kissing and revelry were replaced by a few locally known indoor games such as *Kummi* and "*Kolattam* in the modified form."<sup>12</sup>

Equally important is Vidyasagar's choice of the word *vilas(a)* in substituting 'the comedy'. *Vilasa(a)* means, according to the dictionary of Monier-Williams, sport, play, past-time, pleasure, diversion (especially with women), and it is also applied to any playful action or gesture. It is also the name of a play quoted in *Sahitya Darpana* and connected with many words of love and luxury and pleasure. *Vilas(a)* also appears to be a name of a genre of amusing and pleasurable narratives. The Kannada translation of the play by B. Venkatacharya—he was familiar with Bengali literary tradition and one of the renowned translators of Bengali novels into Kannad—uses the same title, *Bhrantivilasa*. However, it did not culminate, nor was it intended, into the emergence of a new genre. It was only a strategy of appropriation, an attempt to relate the Shakespearean dramatic forms with the larger Indian literary tradition. Its success was limited.

Indians who wanted to retain the dramatic forms adopted a different strategy. They retained all the external features of Shakespearean plays but did not care for their moral or philosophical aspects. They wanted to create a new drama of entertainment, a drama of spectacle and grandeur, which culminated in the Parsi theatre.

Parsi, a community of great innovative imagination, were the first to realise the commercial potentiality of Shakespeare and of the Western theatrical techniques. Their productions were acclaimed by the audience all over India mainly for their flamboyant manner of acting, grandiloquent speeches, loud and titillating music, gorgeous backdrops, dazzling costumes and illusion-creating stage props. The Shakespearean scholars engrossed with the English texts and their various commentaries knew



a Shakespeare which was totally absent in this theatre. It is mainly because of the condemnation of these scholars that Parsi theatre, despite its tremendous popularity, is now totally forgotten; its history now consists of a few fragments of text.

Contrary to the general belief prevalent in academic circles, many of the actors in the Parsi theatre knew English, and the directors and the producers were well acquainted with the latest innovation in the stage in England. An actor named Jamsedji acquired popularity among the enlightened citizens of Bombay by reciting soliloquies from different plays of Shakespeare in all kinds of meetings and gatherings. Jehangir P. Khembatta (1856-1916) in his autobiography *My Experience on the Stage* relates how keen was he to see Shakespeare in London and to act there. Later, after visiting several countries, he started his own company which produced many plays of Shakespeare both in Gujarati and Urdu and Hindustani.<sup>13</sup> The *Victoria Natak Mandali*,<sup>14</sup> another noted Parsi Theatre Company, produced more than thirty plays of Shakespeare all over India and Mandalaya and Bangkok and Java. Unfortunately there is no comprehensive and reliable account of the Parsi theatre although it deserves much respectable treatment if only because of its exciting role in the formation of Indian popular culture. Its impact on the growth of various language theatre was also not negligible. It, of course, changed the characters and situations of Shakespeare plays beyond recognition, but the outcome was the growth of new urban theatre of the masses. The main objection against the Parsi theatre was its total Indianization of the plays of Shakespeare. The most important figure in the history of Parsi theatre is Agha Hashr Kashmiri (1879-1935) who made his debut with the adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* as *Murid-a-shak* in 1899. He was awarded the title 'Indian Shakespeare' by the Delhi Public at a reception held in his honour, for his innovative power and dramatic ingenuity. His major plays *Safed Khun* (1907, *King Lear*), *Said-e-Hawas* (1908, *King John*), and *Khawab-e-Hasti* (1909, *Macbeth*) were all very successful on stage. All his productions of Shakespeare had musical and comic interludes which served a bridge between the traditional Indian dramatic performance which were music-dominated and the modern theatre that grew under European influence. This tradition created by him lingered on for a long time.



The Parsi theatre followed a method of 'translation' of its own. It was not the poetry of Shakespeare, nor the psychological conflicts that interested the Parsi theatre which was keen to appropriate the story with its emotional turbulence and violence of action. In Parsi theatre versions of Shakespeare, one finds Portia singing passionate songs, Viola and Sebastian escaping in the opening scene of the play (*Twelfth Night*) in a railway train which during a thunder-storm crashes into a sea <sup>15</sup>; Antony continues to live while Cleopatra goes to her violent death; *King Lear* is turned into a comedy and the plots of *Richard III* and *King John* are fused into one single play.<sup>16</sup> In a recent article Mr. K. K. Khullar mentions that in *Khoon-e-Nahq* (The Unjustified Murder)—an adaptation of *Hamlet* by Ahsan Lucknawi in 1900—the prince of Denmark is so thoroughly Indianized that his court was converted into a medieval Indian one where princes performed *Kathak* dance and begums chew betel leaves and nuts.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the productions of the Parsi theatre were proved to be great commercial success and they also created a new style of acting. A play named *Saubhagya Sundari* (based on *Othello*) became so popular—made huge profits—that the actor Jayasankar, who played the role of Desdemona (*Sundari* in the Indian version) was nicknamed as Jayasankar Sundari. The impact of the Parsi theatre was also quite significant on the growth of the new proscenium theatre in various language areas. The great Anna Saheb Kirloskar who made a breakthrough in Marathi through his Kirloskar Natak Mandali in 1880 came under the spell of Parsi theatre in his young days. Modern Gujarati theatre too emerged out of the encounters between the Western theatre adopted by the Parsis and the traditional Sanskrit dramatic forms.<sup>18</sup> It also acted negatively by provoking the young dramatists to search for an alternative theatre. Bharatendu, we are told, was drawn towards dramatic writings mainly to counteract what he felt the 'vulgarism' of the Parsi theatre.<sup>19</sup>

The more serious translators and dramatists were successful eventually in resisting the strong influence of Shakespeare but the forces of appropriation generated by the Parsi theatre, remained dormant for some time in the literary subconscious of the Indians, and have now begun surfacing under the banner of sophisticated theories of translation and cultural transfusion.

### III

The frequently translated works of Shakespeare in different languages are both the tragedies and the comedies. The least translated plays were the history plays. The chart prepared by Trivedi indicates that *Henry V* and *Richard II* are the only two plays translated into Hindi, both only once. The “wide unfamiliarity in India with these historical backgrounds”, conjectures Trivedi, “may be partly the reason why these plays have gone abegging.”<sup>20</sup> None of the history plays were available in Bengali till 1962.<sup>21</sup>

The most popular plays, if frequency of translation can be taken as a criterion, of Shakespeare among the Indians are *The Merchant of Venice* (translated more than fifty times) and *The Comedy of Errors* (translated nearly thirty times in different languages). *The Comedy of Errors* has great success on the screen as well.<sup>22</sup> Among the tragedies, the most frequently translated (and staged) are *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and also *Hamlet* (this has been translated fifty times). One of the main reasons for the popularity of Shakespeare in India is the *story*, the ingenuity of the plot. The first Bengali translation of Shakespeare, to which I have referred earlier, changed the play considerably retaining only the main plot highlighting Portia’s cleverness in outwitting Shylock. This as well as the second Bengali translation (*Suralata*, 1877) foreground the heroine rather than the ‘Merchant’, the Hindi and the Marathi translations not only focus on the heroine but specially on her legal prowess. Krishna Hasrat’s Hindi version of *The Merchant of Venice* is entitled *Ek Aurat Ki Vakila* (1908) meaning ‘The Pleading of One Woman’, Narsidas Vanamalidas’ Gujarati version *Stri Nyay Kala* (1893) meaning ‘The Art of Logic of a Woman’, both the Marathi versions *Vilaksan Nyay Caturya* (1868) by Sakharam Pandit and *Stri Nyay Caturya* by A. V. Patkar also emphasize on the dexterity of the heroine in interpreting the law.<sup>23</sup> A few translations, however, foregrounded Shylock: the Urdu adaptations *Chand Sahi Sudkhor* (1895, Chand Sahi, the money-lender) and the Bengali version *Sudkhor Saodagar* (1915, A Money-lender Merchant) are such examples. There are at least two translations with deviant titles encapsulating the theme of the play in two different ways: one is by Bharatendu Harishchandra,

acknowledged as the father of modern Hindi drama, and other by S. B. Gondhalkar, a noted Marathi dramatist. Bhartendu entitles his translation *Durlabh Bandhu* (1880, Rare Friends) with two couplets in the preface, one in Sanskrit and one in Urdu both celebrating friendship.<sup>24</sup> The Marathi version has chosen a more sensational title like that of an Agatha Christie thriller, *Ek pound Mamsa* (1944, A Pound of Flesh).

*The Merchant of Venice* is undoubtedly the most popular of all Shakespeare plays in India in all Indian languages despite the fact that the Indianization of the play has never been fully accomplished. Shylock has been, more or less, easily replaced by Indian money-lenders, but the real stumbling block is the racial hostility between the Jews and the Christians which is something totally outside the Indian experience. Bhartendu, whose translation of the play is otherwise very faithful to the original, has substituted the Christian by *Arya* (i.e. Hindu) and the Jew by *Jain* (a person belonging to the Jaina religion). There is of course a history of *Saiva* (the devotees of Siva, the Hindu god) and Jain hostility in Tamil Nadu in the sixth and seventh centuries A. D., the great *Saiva* poet Sambandha<sup>25</sup> who converted the Pandya King Pandyan, is believed to be involved in the massacre of eight thousand Jains in Madurai. Yet the *Saiva*-Jain hostility is now a forgotten history and never had the magnitude of the Jew-Christian animosity. Bhartendu's Shailaksha (Shylock) speaks those famous lines in Act III, (He has disgrac'd me and hind'ed me half a million, laughed at my losses, mock'd at my gains etc.) quite literally :

*woh sada meri hani par hasa hyay,  
mere labh ki ninda ki hyay, meri jati  
ki apratisih ki hyay, mere vyarharo me  
tac mari hyay, mere mitro ki thanda  
aur mere shatruyo ki garm kiya hyay,  
aur yah sab kis liye? Keval is  
liye ki myay jaini hu.*

The translation is admirable but the Christian-Jew substitution by *Arya*-Jaini is a weak one as there is hardly any evidence of Hindu-Jain hostility comparable to the Jew-Christian relationship to lend credence to the agony of Shailaksh-Shylock. Bharatendu creates more problems for himself when he translates Lancelot's words (III, iv)<sup>26</sup> faithfully:

*av geye aryo ke bharti hone se suar  
ka dam badh jayga. Yadi ham savke  
sav shukarbhaksi ban jayenge to thode  
dino me bahut dam dene se bhi us  
svadist mas ka ek tukda bhi hath na avega*

They remain not only too foreign but also quite offensive to Indian—both Hindu and Muslim—sensibility. That Bharatendu was quite troubled with the Christian-Jewish problem is evident from the sudden surfacing of the word “Christian” in his translation. For example, he translates Shylock’s aside, “I hate him for he is a Christian” (I, iii) into “*myay is-se ghrna karta hu keuki yah isai hyay.*”

Twentieth century Indian translators tried to avoid Bharatendu’s attempt to Indianize the play in this respect and conceded that there was no Indian equivalent of the Christian-Jew relationship in Indian history.<sup>27</sup> It may be mentioned that in Ananta Tripathi’s Sanskrit translation of the play—*Venisha Sarthavahah* (1969, Berhampur, Orissa)—the western personal and place names have been changed successfully but the Jewish-Christian opposition and all allusions from European mythology and history have been retained. Tripathi does not change ‘Jew’ or ‘Christian’ by Hindu or Buddhist. One example will suffice :

*Kevalamham jivya iti. Kimasya jivasya  
ra vartate nayane. No vidyate karau...  
yadi kohipi jivyah khrstayanasypakaroti  
Khrstayana kim karoti? pratihimsa! <sup>28</sup>*

The Indianization of Shakespearean comedies went well with certain plays. *The Comedy of Errors* is one of them. Although *The Merchant of Venice* was the most popular of all comedies, its Indianization proved to be most difficult. Apart from the Christian-Jew issue, various allusion in it were also not easy to negotiate. Bhartendu’s replacement of ‘Troilus’ by ‘Trivikram’, ‘Cressida’ by ‘Kamini’, ‘Dido’ by ‘Jayalakshmi’, and ‘Carthage’ by ‘Kampur’ (V. i) in the dialogues between Lorenzo and Jessica (*The moon shines bright. In such a night as this*) completely denudes them of all traces of Greco-Roman association without creating a meaningful Indian alternative. The oscillation between Indianization on the one hand and the desire to retain the foreign character of the texts on the other, continued throughout the century. A tradition of literal translation existed in India, as evidenced in the Sanskrit *chaya* (shadow/

reflection) of the Prakrit passages to be found in many Sanskrit plays. Yet what predominated was a free translation, adaptation or transcreation. The Indians kept their ancient texts alive by this mechanism, without disputing the sanctity of an "original" or the ur-text. A large number of adaptations of Shakespeare in the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century are part of this tradition. Its aim was to transmit Shakespeare across culture in the same way the Sanskrit epics or Persian tales found place in every Indian home.

#### IV

The translation of tragedies had to negotiate more with conceptual rather than linguistic problems. The unhappy ending which was not rare in Indian non-dramatic literature, was totally prohibited on the stage. Whatever be the philosophical objections to tragedy need not be discussed here. The important issue is that the Indian mind, the Hindu mind to be more precise, was unfamiliar with tragedy as a form of literature, and was not yet prepared to appreciate it fully. Pammal Sambandha Mudaliar records on more than one occasion in his *Natak Metai Ninaivukul* that even after completing plays with tragic endings he had been compelled to alter them and to conclude with a lived-happily-ever-after-note.<sup>29</sup> In some of the early adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy, such as S.M. Ranade's *Atipida Carita* (1880), based on *King Lear* or the Urdu *Othello* and the Sindhi *Romeo and Juliet* changed the plays radically, partly because of the translator's crisis emerging out of psychological resistance to a foreign dramatic structure as well as the public demand for a pleasant and happy ending. But these very translations also initiated a disturbance within the existing literary order and eventually succeeded in creating a space for the accommodation of a new literary genre. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, despite its tragic ending, provided much closer approximation to the Indian experience of love and passion, social authority and individual frustration within the rigidities of caste and marriage rules. The twin lover became a part of the Indian inventory of love legends, that include Radha and Krishna, Laila and Majnu, Shirir and Farhad, Heer and Ranjha, Sohini and Mohiwal and of late Devdas and Parvati.



The success of the tragedies depended, among other things, on the restructuring of the texts. Yajnik mentions that *Romeo and Juliet* proved immensely successful both in Marathi and in the Parsi theatre but not on the Bengali stage.<sup>30</sup> Even in the Marathi stage the play faced stiff resistance. D. A. Keshkasr's translation of the play, under the title *Tara-Vilasa* (1908) which happened to be a musical was not staged at all. But another adaptation, *Mohan-Tara*, by K. R. Chapkhane became extremely popular. Here Rosalini (only mentioned by Shakespeare — in fact she is not mentioned in the Dramatic Personae), informs Yajnik, is brought back on the stage as Kamala and "after her youthful romantic passion, she has to marry Tybalt, but remains still deeply enamoured of Romeo. She also happens to be a boon companion of Juliet. The secret passion of Rosalini serves as an excuse for developing an underplot."<sup>31</sup>

Hamlet is another play which has a glorious stage history in Maharashtra and to some extent in Tamil Nadu. Yajnik writes.... "no Shakespearean play, most faithfully rendered, has ever evoked such unbounded enthusiasm and admiration in India as the Marathi *Hamlet*." *Hamlet* has been translated into Marathi by at least six different writers at different times, including Phatak Nana Saheb in 1862 and by Nana Yog in 1959. The last one is an abridged version of the play in three acts. All characters, including Hamlet, have been Indianized, yet the book is entitled *Hamlet*.

Agarkar's *Vikara Vilas* (1883) had great stage success mainly because of Ganapat Rao Joshi, the legendary actor of the Marathi stage, who played the role of Hamlet (Chandra Sen) for many years till his death in 1922 and Balwantrao Jog who played in the role of Ophelia (Mallika). Agarkar's interpretation of Hamlet as a "tragedy of thought" and his methods of Indianization have evoked occasional criticism, but its popularity was phenomenal. Yajnik informs that "despite its having been acted by Joshi hundreds of times, it was always in demand wherever the company toured." It had five editions, the last being in 1956. The secret of its popularity both as a play and as a translation lies in the strategies adopted by Agarkar. The play is Indianized to a great extent. All the proper names have been replaced by Sanskrit words in such a manner that its European identity is completely effaced. Claudius is



*Bhujanga*, Horatio is *Priyal*, Gertrude is *Madanika*, Hamlet *Chandrasena*, Polonious *Shaleya*, Ophelia is *Mallika*. The place names have been also changed: Elsinore is *Kunjapur*, Denmark is *Balabhadra*, France *Uttal*, Italy *Sagaranta*, Greece *Dasharna*, Paris *Hemakuta*, Poland *Polon* and England *Svetadvip*. Allusions to European myths and legends (e.g. the death of Priam in the play within the play scene) have been replaced by Indian equivalents (the Ashwathama-Dron episode of the Mahabharata in this case). Hindu Polonius (Shaleya) quotes didactic verses in Sanskrit (I, ii) at ease. Yet the translation on the whole does not deviate from the original in its narrative sequence and arrangement of materials. The famous passages have been translated fully and ably. The lines of Shakespeare that have acquired the status of proverb or aphorism have not caused much problems to Indians—Agarkar has translated them with remarkable success. What V. Raghavan observes<sup>12</sup> in the preface to the Sanskrit translation of *Hamlet*<sup>13</sup> —*Dinarka raja Kumara—Hemalekham* (1972) by Sukhamay Mukherjee— can be generalised so far as the nature of translations of aphoristic passages are concerned. The dominant tradition of didactic poetry in Sanskrit and Tamil and Persian—Sadi's *Gulistan* and *Bustan* were parts of Indian literary education—provided the necessary linguistic and cultural contexts for the translation of that component of Shakespearean diction.

Two examples from two different periods and in two different languages, one Hindi and other Sanskrit are given here as evidence. Bharatendu Harishchandra translates

All that glisters is not gold.  
Often have you heard that told

into

*Kari vicara dekhamu jiya mahi  
jo chamakata so suvarana nahi*

in the popular *doha* structure reminiscent of Tulsidas. Ananta Tripathi Sharma translates the famous lines beginning with "All the world's a stage/And all men and women merely players", in *As You Like it* (Act II. Scene 7).

*rangasthalamidam Visvam same ca purusah sriyah  
Vividha bhumika dhrtva bhinayanti rupantatah  
nirgacchantya vagahante manusyah saptabhumikah  
Saptasavankesu svan bhuvan prakasayati niryamah*

*prathamam sisurupo yamanimittam praroditi  
Ksirum ramati dhatrayamse tato bhavati balakah  
kridate syagikam dhrtva pu akanam kare prage  
ksubaho vidyalayam yati premiko juyate tatah.*

Problems were more serious with colloquialism and cultural metaphors, translations of expressions of social behaviour and profanities, proved to be more difficult than those of the rhetorical and lyrical passages. The lines such as these from *Hamlet*, for example,

Ham. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Oph. No, my lord.

Ham. I mean, my head upon your lap?

Oph. Ah: my lord (III, ii).

created great difficulty for the Indian translators because of their suggestions of obscenity. Agarkar deleted the most offensive line "That fair thought to lie between maid's legs" that followed in the conversation but he also makes interesting changes to preserve the decorum of his hero Chandrasen: a compromise between Shakespeare and the taste of his Indian audience

H. *apalya sejari jaga dela ka?*

O. *He kaye maharaj*

H. *Bhiu naka mi dusre tisre kahi karit nahi  
apalya payavar doke tekto tekku kana ko.*<sup>34</sup>

The Sanskrit version done seven decades later tried to solve the problem almost in a similar manner.

H. *Bhadre kim tavotsanke sayisye?*

O. *Deva, na hi.*

H. *Tavotsanke mamam siro nidhayetyaham bramini.*

O. *Deva, atha kim... pramudita khalu bhavan.*

Let us give another example of a different kind.

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak'd meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven

Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio! (I. ii. 180 f).

Agarkar Indianizes the passage and the cultural milieu entailed here quite cleverly.

*Kharc bacavila*

*Sraddhaca brahman-lagnala ani*

*lagnaca sraddhala sate-loite kele in kay?*<sup>35</sup>

Such transformations of Shakespeare either through replacement of metaphors and imagery and allusions by acceptable equivalents in Indian culture, or by addition and deletion (and also by collapsing of episodes) of certain components in the main body of the text were not parts of an erratic exercise. When viewed the translations of Shakespearean texts in different languages in India from the 1860s to the first two or three decades of the twentieth century one notices a remarkable uniformity of approach. Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay who translated *Romeo and Juliet* in Bengali defended this method of Indianization quite strongly, but interestingly he mentioned that such ways of translations were to yield place to different methods of translations in future. Bandyopadhyay writes

I have tried to present the story of the play of Shakespeare and the essential features of the characters in a native mould to suit the taste of the readers of my country. I cannot say how successful I have been. But I believe that without adopting such a method no foreign play will ever find a place in Bengali literature, which will be denied of nourishment and advancement. After a period of such exercises, faithful translations of foreign plays and poems will find acceptance in Bengali literature. But now, for some time to come, I believe, this method is indispensable.

P. Sambanda Mudaliar, who had five decades of theatrical experiences, thought— “the English names would only evoke laughter among the Tamil audience.”<sup>36</sup> He changed the mythological and classical allusions with Indian equivalents. In other words, he oriented the plays of Shakespeare to suit the tastes of the Tamil theatre-goers. Bandyopadhyay's view of Shakespeare translation is not very different from that of Sambandha Mudaliar. Sambandha wrote in his autobiography that “In the past forty years my avowed object has been to write plays which will not offend or embarrass our women, sisters and children in Tamil Nadu because I have to take into account the cultural values and traditions.”<sup>37</sup> His adaptations of Shakespeare were completely dominated by his anxiety for the maintenance of the traditional values.

Whether all translators in other languages also shared the views of Hemchandra or Sambandha—i.e., the indispensability of selective translation and conscious changes in the text according to the taste of the native reader and to postpone a more faithful rendering at a later stage

of familiarity with the alien culture is not clear. But a view similar to this, though not explicitly stated, appears to emerge when translations of one particular text in one given language by different authors at different periods are studied chronologically. A recent study<sup>38</sup> based on five translations of *Macbeth* in Hindi demonstrates how the translators have tried to work out different policies at different times partly as a reaction to the earlier translation and partly to offer new solutions to linguistic and cultural problems of the texts.

Many twentieth century translators in Indian languages, particularly in Bengali, emphasised the necessity of faithful translations of Shakespearean texts reacting strongly against the process of Indianization as well as adaptations or selective translations. Munindranath Ghosh's *Macbeth* and Saurendramohan Mukhopadhyay's *Maner Matan* (As You Like it) are two fine instances of this trend. Girish Chandra Ghosh's translation of *Macbeth* (staged on 28 January 1893, though published on 2 August 1900), is one of the examples of a compromise between the policy of Indianization propounded by Hemchandra and that of a faithful translation advocated by the twentieth century translators. Girish added five songs in his Bengali version, omitted several, if not all allusions, and avoided place names as far as possible. On the other hand, Girish Chandra tried to retain the dialogues and thus to recreate the Shakespearean world on the Bengali stage. The play, however, was not successful on the stage. *Macbeth* was translated again by Nirendranath Ray in 1952.<sup>39</sup> The new translation was certainly very close to the original—nothing was deleted, nothing distorted or condensed and nothing added. It was translated with great care and reverence. It betrays the painstaking scholarship of the translator, nonetheless its language is wooden and dull and the work leaves its *reader* cold.<sup>40</sup> One example, chosen at random, will justify the observation.

Despite the prosaic and laboured syntax and strange collocations, as one finds in the translated text, this work deserves serious attention, as it has the possibility of being infused with life on the stage depending upon the vision and competence of the director. In many countries the translation of Shakespeare texts has been accomplished only with the translator-director combination. Boris Pasternak's relationship with Vladimir Nimirovich-Danchenko, the director at the Moscow Art Theatre comes

immediately to mind.<sup>41</sup> But there are other instances of successful collaboration as well. This brings us to another problem—more complex and more pertinent—that of the goal of the translation. Shakespearean texts are not meant to be read only. The main requirement of the translation, is to capture the performativity of the text. I have pointed out before that because of the historical situation, the politics and the languages of India, there is a large number of people who can read the original and the translation, providing a duality of perception of the Shakespearean texts. The presence of the English Shakespeare in our literary memory and experience is a constant challenge to the translator. This challenge becomes more acute when both the readability and the stageability are the aims of translation. The hegemony of the English text which is the dominating fact of Indian literary life can be challenged adequately only through performance. Literary translations are meant for the eye, not the ear. They naturally preclude an essential dimension of the Shakespearean text. The latest trend in translating Shakespeare is, therefore, a valorisation of the translation of the theatre, rather than for the theatre.<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

1. Translated by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1966, p. 190.

2. Quoted by Prof. K. Chellappan, 'Shakespeare and the Tamil Mind' First endowment lecture in honour of Padmabhushan Dr. Rajah Sir M.A. Muthia Chettiar at the University of Delhi, 1998 (unpublished).

3. *Vikara Vilasita*, tr. Go. Ga. Agarkar, 5th reprint 1956, p. 23. Madhav Gopal Deshmukh in another preface in its 1954 edition compares *Hamlet* with Tilak's *Gitarahasya* with reference to *Kartavya* (duty) and *a-kartavya* (what not-to-be-done). I am indebted to Professor Jayanti Chattopadhyay for helping me in reading Marathi materials used in this paper.

4. Rabindranath Tagore, *Malini* (1896) introduction.

5. This metaphor comes from Augusto De Campos' idea of translation, which can be linked to Walter Benjamin's notion of the translation as after-life. See Susan Bassnett, 'Servants of the Word', *Word in Time: Poetry, Narrative, Translation*, ed by Leon Burnett. University of Essex, Colchester, 1997 p. 51.

6. See H.K. Trivedi, 'Hindi Translations of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Translation* (Tokyo), Vol. V. 1978, p. 80.

7. N. Arul, *A Study of Translations and Adaptations of Shakespeare Plays in Tamil* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Delhi, 1997), p. 55.

8. Historically, however, one Monkton, a writer in the East India Company and a student of the College of Fort William, translated *The Tempest* in Bengali in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The manuscript is not extant.

9. It is important to note that the first Bengali original play *Bhadrarjun*, claimed to have been written on Western model was published in 1852. J.C. Gupta's *Kirtivilas*, also published in 1852, was a play with an unhappy ending, an innovation in Indian dramatic literature.

10. Quoted in Sanat Kumar Mitra, *Shakespeare O Bangla Natak*, Calcutta, 1983, p. 46.

11. C. C. Mehta, 'Shakespeare and Gujarati Stage', *Indian Literature*, Vol. VII, No. 1, 1964, p. 41f.

12. Arul, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

13. See Duyanewar Nadkarni, 'Shakespeare in Maharashtra', *A Tribute to Shakespeare*, 1989, Theatre and Television Associates Ed. by Sunita Paul, p. 20.

14. The first Parsi theatre was started in 1877 by Pestonji Franji. It was followed by Victoria Natak Mandali founded by Khurshidji Baliwala in Delhi also in 1877. There were several other companies operating in Bombay which travelled all over north India.

15. Yajnik, p. 140.

16. *Ibid.*

17. K. K. Khullar, 'As Indian as Rogan Josh', *The Statesman*, 2 July 1998. Kishore Shahu's Hindi film *Hamlet* was based on Ahsan text. "Instead of drinking from the poisoned cup, Gertrude had to make do with milk."

18. See Shiv Kumar Joshi, Gujarati Drama, *Comparative Indian Literature*, ed. K.M. George, Vol. I. Macmillan, Delhi, 1984, pp. 500-01.

19. Bharatendu in his famous essay *Natak* (The Drama) describes the strong reaction of the educated audience against the crudities of the performance of *Shakuntala* staged by a Parsi Theatre Company. See I. N. Chaudhuri, Hindi Drama, *Comparative Indian Literature*, *ibid.*, p. 508.

20. Trivedi, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

21. See Sanat Kumar Mitra, *Shakespeare O Bangla Natak* (Shakespeare and Bengali Drama), Calcutta, 1983, p. 200. Also see Pramod Mukhopadhyay, *Bangla Anuvad Natak Samiksha* (Critical Account of Translated plays into Bengali), Calcutta, 1984.

22. Shakespeare is yet to find a place in the Indian film world. *The Comedy of Errors* which was filmed both in Bengali and Hindi had considerable success. Gulzar's *Angur*, based on this play, does not mention its debt to Shakespeare



but at the end of the film a portrait of Shakespeare winking at the audience is flashed on the screen. *Hamlet* is the only tragedy to be filmed in Hindi in the mid-1950s. Tamil film industry, however, has taken greater interest in Shakespeare. *Shylock* (based on *The Merchant of Venice*) was produced in 1940. *Cymbeline*, rendered as *Katakam*, was released in 1947. Both failed in the box office. The production of *Twelfth Night*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Arivali*, with Shivaji Ganesan and P. Bhanumati in the main roles), and *Romeo and Juliet* indicate Tamil interest in Shakespeare. Arul, *op.cit.*, pp. 127-30.

23. It is interesting to note that in the early phase of Shakespeare translation in China (1913-15) known as the *Wenmingxi* period, *The Merchant of Venice* was variously titled in the Chinese adaptations, such as 'A Pound of Flesh', 'The Woman Attorney', 'Flesh Contract'. *Wenmingxi* plays mainly derived their plots from Lamb's *Tales* and they served as the forerunners of "actual Shakespeare" that appeared on the Chinese stage later. Meng Xianquiang, *A Historical Survey of Shakespeare in China*, Shakespeare Research Centre of Northeast Normal University, 1996, 3, pp. 7-8.

24. The Sanskrit couplet is as follows:

*durlabhah gunino surah datarasceti durlabhab  
mitrarthe tyakto sarvasava bandhu sarvais sudurlabhah.*  
The Urdu verse is  
*Khoda mile to mile asna nahi milta  
Kisi ka koi nehi dost sav kahani hay.*

25. The Tamil translation of the play, entitled *Vanipura Vanikan* by Pammel Sambandha Mudaliyan, the greatest figure in the history of Shakespeare translation in Tamil, changes Shylock into a Jain *baniya* (merchant) and the Christian society of Venice into the Hindu Saiva Tamil society of Vanipuri, a fictional location, substituting Venice.

26. "This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs, if we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rash on the coals for money."

27. R. K. Yajnik mentions (*The Indian Theatre*, London, 1933) an Urdu adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (probably entitled *Dilfaroshi*) in which the story has been located in Bagdad known for its age long animosity between the Jewish traders and the Muslim population (P. 133). The Marathi version substitutes the Christian-Jew relationship by the Brahmin-Buddhist.

28. And what's the reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands.... If a Jew wrong a Christian what is his humility? Revenge. III, i.

29. Arul, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

30. Yajnik, *op.cit.*, p. 157

31. Yajnik, *Indian Theatre, op.cit.*

32. "A noteworthy aspect of the diction of the translator is that, being soaked in the plays of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti and Visakhadatta, he incorporates into the prose and verse of his phrases and expressions from the well-known Sanskrit plays....Examples of this kind of happy renderings are to be seen all over the work but these are particularly conspicuous in places where in the original, there are moralisings and general observations on men and things which lend themselves particularly well to be put in the garb of the Sanskrit *niti* and *Subhashita*." V. Raghavan.

33. The Sanskrit *Hamlet* is published by Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi in 1972.

34. H. Will you (allow me) to sit beside you?

O. What is this, Maharaj?

H. Don't fear. I am not going to do anything (dusre-tisr)

Shall I keep my head on your feet?

35. "Only to reduce the expenditure.

[An exchange between] the brahmin for the last rite ceremony and the brahmin for the wedding. Has he done intermarriage?"

Nana Jog in his translation, done after several decades, follows the same strategy with a more extended and vivid metaphor of cooking.

"are kat kasar! Kat Kasar mhanatat hila  
ekac talnat sraddha barobar lagnacyahi  
bundi padun ghella"

"It's thrift! Sweets for *Shraddha* (the last rite) and sweets for marriage are prepared in the same frying pan."

36. Arul, *op.cit.*.... p. 49.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

38. Promilla Puri demonstrates in her *Translation of Shakespeare in Hindi* (An M.Phil. dissertation at the University of Delhi, 1991, unpublished).

The first translation *Sahasendra Sahas* (1893) by Mathura Prasad Upadhyay was an Indianized version as well as an adaptation. J.P. Mishra (*Shakespeare's Impact on Hindi Literature*, Delhi, 1970) praises it, despite its language being "stiff and monotonous, owing to the constant use of Sanskritized Hindi." Dashrath Ojha, a distinguished critic of Hindi describes it as *Saras* (Plesant) and *Saphal* (successful) — see *Hindi natak Ka Udbhav aur Vikas* (1945) Lala Sita Ram's translation, *Macbeth* (1926), retains all the names of the characters and places as they are in the original, and it follows the English text closely, though certain speeches have been condensed. The third translation by V. Sharma (the date of publication is not known, but probably in the early 1930s) was published by the same publisher. The translations differ in their choice of diction, the former prefers a simple and colloquial Hindi and the latter a rhetorical style.

*Macbeth* was translated for the fourth time in 1957 by Rangeya Raghava. It is a work done in great haste— Raghav translated fifteen plays of Shakespeare within one year, between 1957-58, mostly under great financial strain,— his chief aim was to translate the texts as literally as possible as a result of which, Mrs. Puri observes, “he produced a work which neither reflects the creative power of Shakespeare nor his” (p.29). In 1957. Harivansh Rai Bacchan, the distinguished Hindi poet, of *Madhushala* fame, brought out another translation of *Macbeth*. While previous translators employed prose, except in the dialogues of the witches, Bacchan used both prose and verse to reflect the linguistic texture of the original. In his preface he pointed out the inadequacies of the earlier renderings describing them as *Chayanuvad* (shadow-translation). His translation is ‘faithful’ and theatre-oriented: it was staged successfully towards the end of 1958. Twenty-three years later, Raghuvir Sahai translated the play again, under the title *Barnam Van*, probably at the suggestion of B.V. Karanth, then the director of the National School of Drama, who directed it. He did not Indianize the names of characters or places, but omitted all specific allusions, and even edited some parts of the dialogues of the witches. Like Bacchan’s, this translation was also stage-oriented. It was staged in the *Yakshagana* style before it was published.

39. This translation is the second publication sponsored by *Bangiya Shakespeare Parisat*, the first being *The Merchant of Venice* by Sunil Chattopadhyay with an introduction by Subodh Chandra Sengupta. The third work was *As You Like it*, also translated by Sunil Chattopadhyay, which had an introduction by Srikumar Bandyopadhyay. It was a project conducted primarily by scholars— some of them were well-known teachers of Shakespeare. They retained the original titles, so keen were they to adhere to the original text. The *Parisat* (association) formulated rules which stipulated the translation of “each and every word of the original text” and not to add anything not found in the original. It also tried to follow the word-order and the metrical pauses.

40. One passage is quoted here to give some idea of the nature of the translation.

Lady, Macbeth, Give him tending:  
 He brings great news.  
       The raven himself is hoarse  
 That croaks the fatal entrance of  
 Duncan under my battlements. Come,  
 you spirits that tend on mortal  
 thoughts, unsex me here:  
 And fill me, from the crown  
 to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,

Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose nor keep place between (I, v).

কর তারে যোগ্য সমাদর

সে এনেছে প্রকাণ্ড খবর।

সেই বায়সের স্বরভাঙা, যার কণ্ঠে ধ্বনিতোছে

ডানকানের শেষ আগমন আমার প্রাকার মধ্যে।

হত্যার ভাবনা-সাথী পিশাচেরা এসো করো মোরে

অ-রমণী, পূর্ণ করো আপাদমস্তক গাঢ়তম

নিষ্ঠুরতা দিয়া ; রক্ত মোর ঘন করা ; করুণার

সব পথ রুদ্ধ করে দাও, স্বাভাবিক প্রবৃত্তির প্রবণতা যেন

না পারে পড়াতে মোর নির্দয় কামনা ;

তাহার ও সাফল্যের মাঝে নাহি যেন রাখে ব্যবধান।

41. See Alexander Anikst's statement on Pasternak's translation of Shakespeare in *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* ed. by John Elson. Routledge, London, 1989. Anikst is a Russian theatre critic.

42. See the comments of Jean-Michel Deprats, the French director and translator, on the problem of translating Shakespeare into French. Elson, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

